

Teachers' Perceptions about Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-Primary Level

By

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: “Teachers’ Perceptions about Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-Primary Level.”

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1. Source of population

Government Pre-Primary Teachers in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects - no
- b) Social risk- no
- c) Psychological risk to subjects - no
- d) discomfort to subjects- no
- e) Invasion of privacy- no

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study- yes
- b) Procedures to be followed- yes
- c) Physical risk- n/a
- d) Sensitive questions- yes
- e) Benefits to be derived- yes
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study- yes
- g) Confidential handling of data- yes
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved- yes

4. Will Signed verbal consent for be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants- yes
- b) from parents or guardian - n/a
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect anonymity of subjects? - yes

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

- a) Proposal- yes
- b) Consent Form- yes
- c) Questionnaire or interview schedule - yes

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Abstract

This paper aims to know the teachers' perceptions about the role of play in developing the literacy skills of the children are very essential. Play-based pre-primary education to develop early literacy skills is gaining ground all over the world including Bangladesh. Early literacy skill of a child is an essential factor for the readiness for primary school. Children who can recognize words, read letters, understand signs and symbols, and so on are taken as skills in literacy. The play has a significant role to support cognitive-linguistic abilities and skills that help children learn to read. The development of literacy skills in pre-primary level children is of great importance for making them ready for primary school and future quality education. As the play has an immense impact on children's learning literacy, the teachers' perception deserves to be reviewed and examined. Qualitative research was set to explore the situation of the teachers' perception of early literacy skills with two key research questions. The study population was the teachers of government primary schools from both Dhaka North and South City teaching in the pre-primary class. The data were analyzed with the qualitative approach. A content analysis technique was followed. The data collected were triangulated for testing the authenticity. Ethical principles were strictly followed and were necessary to clarify under what conditions the research had been carried out. Most of the participants were found to show positive perceptions of play-based pedagogy and literacy skills. But they have been facing problems in the practice and implementation of the plays in the classroom, such as lack of space, time allocation, lack of materials, and most importantly, lack of training on play-based pedagogy. The research has provided a set of recommendations to overcome the problems- provide of hands-on training to the pre-primary teachers on play-based pedagogy, remove the shortage of play materials, creating supportive classroom environment for the children etc.

Keywords: Pre-primary Teachers; Perception; Early Literacy Skills; Play-based Pedagogy

Dedication

The thesis is dedicated to my-beloved "PARENTS"- Md. Osman Gani and Shahanara Begum to whom I owe for life and the light of education.

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List of Acronyms

BEN: Bangladesh ECD Network

DPE: Directorate of Primary Education

ECD: Early Childhood Development

FGD: Focus group discussion

IDI: In-Depth Interview

MoPME: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

NCTB: National Curriculum and Textbook Board

Chapter I: Introduction & Background

Introduction

Play is a very significant pedagogical tool to impart early literacy skills-the essential qualities of a child for his holistic academic and social development. Children who can recognize words, read characters, understand signs and symbols, and so on are taken as skills in literacy (Hossain et al., 2022). The play has a large formative role in literacy and language development. Play has a significant role to support cognitive-linguistic abilities and skills that help children learn to read (Roskos & Christie, 2011). The development of literacy skills in pre-primary level children is of great importance for making them ready for primary school and higher education (Sjoerdsma, 2016). The literacy skill of a child is an essential factor for the readiness for primary school.

Play has a significant impact on early childhood literacy, and play-based pedagogy is beneficial for the development of literacy skills of pre-primary level students. Early-grade literacy development means the knowledge and skills that help preschool children learn to read and write (Ahmed, 2018). Play helps the children bloom their maturity and emotions and builds up the self-confidence to explore new activities and concepts (Irvin, 2017). Play-based pedagogy is very effective for preschool children to increase literacy skills along with interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Early literacy development is the foremost priority of a child as it will support him/her to read and write before entering into primary grades (Roskos, 2014; Rafi, 2011).

In modern times, the term early literacy development is connoted with the terms emergent literacy, emergent reading, emergent writing, early reading, and so on. Early grade literacy development means the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help preschool children learn to read and write. Early-grade literacy development provides a child with developmentally

appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support to improve reading and writing skills. And in this respect, play is the most effective way to encourage children to make their literacy activities meaningful and joyous for them (Ali et al., 2011; Ervin & Miller, 2012).

Children also develop their learning by playing with peers. Play leads children to develop their social and cognitive skills. Play helps the children bloom their maturity and emotions and builds up the self-confidence to explore new activities and concepts. Play is important as it forms the world of creativity of a child along with developing a healthy brain development. In fact, through play children interact and engage themselves in an explorative world of their own and acquire more and more knowledge of their surroundings and the earth (Mielonen & Paterson, 2009).

As the play has an immense impact on children's learning literacy, the teachers' perception deserves to be reviewed and analyzed. From the academic year 2023, Bangladesh is going to introduce the Pre-primary 4+ on a piloting basis in 3226 schools along with the Pre-primary 5+ level with the existing interim curriculum. The regular curriculum has also been developed under the guideline of National Curriculum Framework 2021 by NCTB and according to the Attainable Competency No. 4.1, a total of 11 learning outcomes have been proposed to develop the literacy skills of pre-primary children. The attainable competency and learning outcomes focus on Reading, Writing, and Speaking smoothly. The areas which are emphasized are signs, symbols, identifying the letters by seeing and observing, understanding and expressing pictures and images, expressing through sound, words, body gestures speaking small words, small sentences of two or three words, etc. (Pre-primary curriculum 4+ and 5+ developed by NCTB-unpublished). The curriculum has been developed with the aim of children's early literacy development through great emphasis on play-based learning pedagogy.

The introduction of preprimary education in Bangladesh is comparatively new and the teachers of the preprimary teachers received insufficient training on the curriculum and teaching pedagogy. They were not much aware of the play-based instructions which refer to providing meaningful hands-on learning experiences to be acquired by the children through play. The teachers usually let the children play based on their interests and experiences of the children. But in Bangladesh, most of the teachers are of traditional philosophy of teaching-learning process in which the place of play does not possess an important place. Here, most of the teachers, emphasize academic progress for career build-up (Das & Akter, 2021).

Literacy skills further indicate the ability to read, write, speak, and different expressions like social, emotional, and personal feelings of joy, sorrow, problem-solving, etc. Literacy skills in primary-level children are not as satisfactory as expected (Salahuddin,2020). The reasons are assumed to be the weak foundations of the learners while they were at the pre-primary level. The pre-primary level education started just a few years back with teachers having no training, very little knowledge, or experience. A few studies were carried out to explore the usefulness of play in the pre-schools, or the development of play materials, etc. by different researchers, NGOs, and BRAC IED. But, there is not enough study on the perceptions of the pre-primary teachers of the government primary schools on the effectiveness of the play-based pedagogy to improve literacy skills. The number of government primary schools is too big and the impact of the effective use of play-based pedagogy is highly related to the successful development of the literacy skills of preschoolers. The results of the study will help the policymakers and educationists to take programs for the development of the teachers' quality by solving the problems and taking measures of providing subject-specific training etc. Besides, the findings of the study will also help improve the overall ECE by providing insights into the problems of the teachers and initiating further research.

Statement of the Problem

The pre-primary curriculum, developed in 2014 with an emphasis on all 4 domains suggested by ELDS, aimed at literacy skills keeping the play in the focus. But, in Bangladesh, it is observed, most of the preprimary teachers are of the traditional view of the teaching-learning process in which play does not possess an important place. Here, most of the teachers, emphasize academic progress for career build-up (Rahman et al., 2020). The teachers are not aware of the plays like types of plays such as free play, guided play, teachers' role in applying the games during the lessons, etc. for the literacy development of the 4-6 years' children (Das & Akter,2021). Pre-primary education has been introduced in Bangladesh in 2014 to develop a child holistically – cognitively, physically, mentally, and linguistically as per the demand of Early Childhood Development (ECD) vision. The National Education Policy 2010 has categorically emphasized the introduction of 1-year pre-primary education for 5+ children in the first phase, later 4+ gradually to enhance the above-mentioned qualities further before starting regular primary education (U. P. Education, 2013).

The literacy skills, such as the ability to read and write Bangla, their mother tongue fluently and correctly, of pre-primary children are gradually failing to reach its standard as was reflected in many studies including the NSA study in 2017 (Division, 2022). The teachers play the anchor role to develop the literacy skills of the early-grade learners. The poor literacy skills of preschool students pose risks for their future persuasion of standard primary and secondary level education (Monitoring and Evaluation Division Directorate of Primary Education, 2018). It is important to know whether the pre-primary level teachers teach the children following play-based pedagogy practicing with play materials etc. in the classroom.

Pre-primary education is play-based all over the world. In Bangladesh, the pre-primary classrooms are equipped with sufficient numbers of play materials. The teachers are supposed to use the play materials in the classroom while teaching literacy skills. They should motivate

the children also to learn through play in the classroom. If the perceptions are not clear and sound of the pre-primary teachers, the appropriate learning process is not maintained to achieve its desired goal. The lack of perceptions of the pre-primary teachers on the play-based pedagogy also will hamper the student's ability to participate in educational activities (Rahman et al., 2020).

Early literacy concepts and skills of preschool children are enhanced through play which engages the children in a meaningful context for learning. The preschool teachers are to be aware that the children their literacy skills in all aspects of communication viz. listening, speaking, reading, and writing including body language and gestures. Especially, play-based pedagogy helps preschool children to increase interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships through communication with peers and relatives (Kiuru et al., 2017). The public and educationists have recently begun to criticize the overwhelming academic pressure on the students resulting in the elimination of the scope of play and games in the kindergarten and preprimary classrooms.

From the 2023 academic session, NCTB will start pre-primary schooling for 4+ children also on a pilot basis in over three thousand government primary schools for preparing the guardians and the stakeholders. In this regard, a new curriculum for PPE has been developed by NCTB in 2022 for PPE 4+ and 5+ as per the scale-up plan of MoPME from 1-year PPE to 2-year PPE. The new Teachers' Guide for the teachers has also been developed. The new curriculum, developed for the 1st time, also has emphasized the development of literacy skills of the preschoolers (Source: National Curriculum for Pre-primary 4+ and 5+ children-2022, by NCTB-unpublished). In such a backdrop, the teachers' perception on the play based pedagogy will become an important factor to implement the 4+ pre-primary teaching-learning activities, especially the use of play and play materials to make the preschoolers feel joyous in learning and thereby, help develop their literacy skills.

Purpose of the Study

The teachers' perceptions about the role of play in the development of the literacy skills of the children are very essential. But, the teachers who are in service now at the pre-primary level in government schools are appointed without prior training. They were given 15 days long training which was not sufficient for developing the perceptions of the teachers about the ways and techniques to improve the literacy skills of the preschoolers (Directorate of Primary Education, 2012). Even most teachers don't have a fair knowledge of play-based pedagogy- how plays can help preschool children in developing their literacy skills; what types of play are beneficial for literacy development, how play contributes to the children's capacity of expressions, logic, and arguments, taking decisions, think critically to solve problems or how they can communicate their ideas and thoughts among themselves and with their elder members around them, etc.

So, the purpose of the study is to explore the perception of the teachers regarding the importance of a play-based approach in developing the early literacy skill of pre-primary children. Besides, the study will help to identify the factors which influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop early literacy skills in pre-primary children. Moreover, improving the literacy skills of pre-primary children need special attention from the teachers. So, it is important to extract some of the perceptions of the teachers to design way-outs or any training program for them.

Significance of the Study

The last NSA held in 2017 and Situation Analysis and Need assessment study by NCTB show the skills of reading and writing of pre-primary level children aged 4-6 are not as standard as expected in Bangladesh (Monitoring and Evaluation Division Directorate of Primary Education, 2018). In developed countries, play-based pedagogy is very popular in preprimary

schools. In Bangladesh also, it has been gaining ground gradually in line with modern teaching-learning teaching science. So, the government preprimary school teachers need to know about the benefits of play and how it helps the development of the literacy skills of preschoolers.

Vygotsky, Piaget, Froebel, and many other child psychologists are the pioneers of the play-based teaching process for children. They opined in favor of play due to the social nature of language learning and the environment of the play which influences the development of the children. It is found studies that play ensures many skills in children including the capacity for reading and writing (Nilsson & Ferholt, 2014). Children who are good at sports and plays, tend to think better as they experience a variety of expressions of language. There is a link between the expertise of play children and better language skills in both receptive and expressive language.

As the teachers are the persons to guide the preprimary children in the teaching of literacy skills, their perceptions of play-based learning are important to explore. The perceptions of the pre-primary teachers are to be explored so that the situation of the teachers' position will be identified and necessary measures/ training programs can be planned. The study findings will help policymakers to formulate policies and programs to implement the new curriculum at the pre-primary level. The findings of this research will help to do large-scale studies in the future on a related topic.

Research Questions

At the pre-primary level, the learners are to be prepared with a focus on literacy skills to prepare them for regular primary education. So, to know about the perceptions of the teachers about the importance of play, we think it is a very timely endeavor to explore some ideas about the situation of the teachers in this respect. We have developed the following research questions to find out the answer to the above-mentioned situation:

1. What is the teachers' knowledge about the use of a play-based approach to developing literacy skills for pre-primary children?
2. What factors influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills in pre-primary children?

For further understanding and deeper analysis, the two main research questions were split into three thematic heads:

1. Knowledge of teacher about the use of play-based approach to developing literacy skills for pre-primary children.
2. The practice of a play-based approach to developing early literacy skills for early-grade children.
3. Factors influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills.

To bring out the intended perceptions of the pre-primary teachers, an In-Depth-Interview questionnaire, an FGD guideline, and a classroom observation checklist were formulated with different sub-questions focusing on the three thematic areas.

Operational Definition

Teachers: Teachers are the architects of the education system of s country. Dewey explains that a teacher is an expert to organize experiences for the children to learn content- social and emotional, academic and democratic skills (M. T. Islam, 2016). A teacher disseminates knowledge and information to the learners in a particular setting and atmosphere and helps the learners acquire skills and values to become future responsible citizens in society. Pre-primary teachers are very important to the life of children of 5-6 years as they are the stone-founder of early literacy skills. A teacher usually serves as a guide, a mentor, and a support provider to the children to achieve the academic goals as per the curriculum (Rashid, 2021). To implement

play-based pedagogy, a teacher needs to use many strategies and tools to bring the children into the process of learning (Das & Akter, 2021). A teacher is supposed to ensure a supportive classroom environment for the student, especially in the pre-primary setting. Here, in this study, teachers meant those who teach 4-6 years of children in government primary schools.

Perception: Perceptions means the knowledge and understanding, views and opinions about a subject or topic of teaching or learning. It is a process by which a person thinks critically and acts as per the stimuli of the environment to develop cognitive notions, and finally, interprets the information from observations and experiences to make a judgment in the right way for a purpose (F. Islam, 2021). Perception is subjective and people take different stands for the same situation or event. Here, the perception will indicate the knowledge, ideas, and skills of the government pre-primary school teachers over the use of the play-based approach for developing literacy skills.

Play-based Pedagogy: Play-based pedagogy or learning through play is a modern approach that indicates a type of ECE focusing on child-led, open-ended play to develop early literacy skills. An activity that is voluntary and delightful is considered play (Alam, 2022; Christie & Roskos, 2009; Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali, 2013). Play at the pre-primary level has much significance for the children as it is planned and designed carefully by the educators and implemented in the classroom by the teacher to achieve specific learning goals and objectives (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022). Play-based pedagogy means the methods, techniques, and tools for guided and free plays used by the teacher so that the children can learn with fun, hands-on experience and in an engaging way (Mardell et al., 2016; Nini, 2021). In this study, perceptions of the pre-primary teachers of the government primary schools on play-based pedagogy have been discussed and analyzed.

Early Literacy Skills: Early literacy skills are of immense importance as these provide the foundation of future better learning. Literacy begins after birth and it is an ongoing process (Strickland et al., 2004). Early literacy develops in the family and then in institutions. Children develop their literacy skills through plays, games, and communication with parents, relatives, peers, and teachers. Listening, speaking, reading, writing, phonological awareness, numerical senses, etc. are the components of early literacy development. Early literacy skill means the ability to understand the alphabet, signs, and symbols, decode pictures, images, and strikers, and speak in standard pronunciation (Kenanoğlu & Duran, 2021). It also shows the capacity to interpret and convey the messages received from others for effective communication.

Pre-primary Children: According to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), and UNICEF standards, the range of early-grade children's age is 6-8 (February 2011; M. Education, 2013). The children of the age group 4- 6 enjoy playing from an early age. They are more prone to play than to listen to lectures in the classroom. If learning is blended with play, then play and learning becomes synonymous (Millard et al., n.d.). In this study, pre-primary children will mean the learners of pre-primary level belonging to the age group 4-6 in the government primary schools.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this section, literature was reviewed based on a few themes e.g. definition of early literacy, the importance of play in early literacy development, teachers' Perception in a global context, teachers' perception in a Bangladesh context, etc.

Definition of Early Literacy

Early literacy means the ability to read and write. It is a fundamental skill that allows individuals to access information, communicate effectively, and participate fully in society. Literacy is developed in early childhood and early literacy makes a child able to use language in different forms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking about ideas (Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali, 2013). Literacy includes both print literacy (the ability to read and write) and digital literacy (the ability to use technology to access, evaluate, and create information).

Literacy is defined as, “the ability to read and write”. On the other hand, play means "voluntary engagement in enjoyable activities.” From the social construction point of view, it is apparent that literacy skills may evolve naturally during play for young children. Before the mid1900s, the common view was that play had to be experienced outside of school walls (Hall, 1991, p.3). In 1987, Hall noted that teachers were teaching literacy in a very controlled manner. The result of this was negatively impacting students. Research within the last 25 years or so finds a more positive connection between literacy learning and play (Mardell et al., 2016). Researchers assert that play enhances a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development, showing a play environment that is rich in literacy can develop early literacy skills within young children. Social interactions encourage children to learn through authentic experiences. Early childhood researcher Klenk (2001) mentions social interactions during play “do not hinge on formal instruction, they are authentic and purposeful” (Mielonen & Paterson, 2009).

Literacy skill primarily means the development of language skills (Christie & Roskos, 2009). And language means a social concept that comes through social interactions. A child is as much as intellectual as he is strong in his language skills. Play is an activity that provides children opportunities to learn language from their peers and practice their learning in different perspectives and scenarios. Interactions with peers and friends and the environment lead a child to achieve language skills. Vygotsky's theory of language learning indicates that children acquire knowledge by being engaged in social experiences. The child can learn how to perform a task from the adults by following the directions of the adults appropriately.

Importance of Play in Early Literacy Development

Play has got the recognition of being pivotal for learning of children. As failure is an opportunity to try again, Vygotsky (1978) asserted that "a child's greatest achievements are possible in play, an achievement that will tomorrow become her basic level of real action." Play is an important tool of ECD and by playing children can make sense of the world around them as well as develop knowledge and social skills (Shatil & Zaman, 2021). Of the many beneficial qualities of play, one is that it has the potential of contributing to procedural and conceptual knowledge (Hyvonen, 2011). Play enhances the physical, social, moral, creative, and motor skills of children through play-based pedagogy and ensuring the proper environment of the classroom. The imagination of the children increases; their academic skills like reading, writing, vocabulary, and math through using blocks, flashcards, slippers, rides, rhymes, songs, drawing, acting, role play, outdoor plays, etc. (Rahman et al., 2020).

Over the years, early childhood education gained a lot of attention and influential scholars like Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Froebel, Rousseau, and so on contributed to developing different teaching philosophies and approaches for early childhood education (Sjoerdsma, 2016). Of the multiple approaches to early childhood teaching, teacher-directed instruction, student-centered teaching-learning, active and cooperative learning, and play-based learning, etc. are worth

mentioning. Play has a deep role in the development of a child as Vygotsky says through play a child creates, adept, explore, experiment, learn, communicate, socialize and problem solve (Sjoerdsma, 2016).

Play is a very significant tool for the balanced and ideal development of a child regarding communication and creativity of action. Play is a natural, spontaneous, self-initiated, and enjoyable activity for a child (Vygotsky, 1967). Play is an essential vehicle for the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development of a child. Moreover, through play, a child reflects on his or her development. Play is the natural medium of communication for children and it helps children develop their imaginations and creativity (Sluss, 2005). Play provides an opportunity for children to build and extend their knowledge and skills when they interact with their environment and the people around them.

Fredric Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten, defines play as “play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in child’s soul (Sluss, 2005).” Vygotsky provides the most crucial reflection of play in children's life saying that it creates the zone of proximal development. In the play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself (Bodrova et al., 2013; Nilsson & Ferholt, 2014).”

Teachers’ Perception in Global Context

Research in Malaysia supports the fact that teaching and learning through play can enhance a child's literacy skills, mainly reading abilities. Results show that teaching and learning through play increase children`s attention span and develop their reading skills. The play has significant advantages since it provides more opportunities for children to talk using varied words. The study revealed that 55% of teachers had a strongly positive view that play-based pedagogy could develop literacy skills while 33% agreed with the view (Ali et al., 2011).

The play has an inherent power to transform a child who can reproduce and even go beyond what is given to him. Play can provide varied contexts to a child at home and at school for acquiring literacy and numeracy skills. And the teachers have a strategic role to develop plays, use of playful pedagogical approaches, and engaging the children in meaningful play to develop literacy skills (Christie & Roskos, 2009).

In a study in Malaysia, teachers also recognized play as having great value in learning. Play has a major influence on the construction of understanding and promoting children's cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains skills development as they believe that playing is the nature of children. According to them, children can learn the language and number concepts – the basic elements of early literacy through play. Besides, play also develop the children's psychomotor skills. As teachers, they allow the children to play and they plan activities to learn and get something from it. Even the parents also put positive feedback about play-based pedagogy as it made the children getting friendly with the school teachers, besides helping them learn to adapt to real school life in primary schools. The teachers found that play could be effective when it is connected with the topic or subject aligned to learning outcomes. Teachers, under the study, also found that the children felt attracted when the teachers taught them mathematics activities by adding or subtracting by using toy blocks or other equipment. In Malaysia, classroom management had got an emphasis as they divided the classroom space into four corners namely, a) science and technology corner, b) art and craft corner, c) imaginative and role play corner, and d) reading corner. Moreover, the teachers engaged the children in both individual play and group play (Abu Bakar et al., 2015).

Teachers in India also cherish mixed perceptions and feelings about play-based pedagogy. In India, most parents see play as a waste of time. Still, the teachers' perceptions of the formative effects of play in developing literacy skills are very encouraging. In Japan, America, and Australia play-based pedagogy is given the highest preference to ensure the quality of early-

grade literacy. The teachers are well aware of the benefits of the play-based approach for the formation of early-grade literacy (Wood, 2008).

A teacher at the International School of Billund in Denmark found that children learn well through play. He discovered that the children working in pairs finally succeeded to draw a world map on an orange 20 minutes of consultations, laughter, and confusion. Children in a class assigned by the teacher consulted globes, atlases, large wall maps, and Google Earth and outlined the continents. The teacher found the children to be clear in understanding the three-dimensional earth and two-dimensional representations like the map by drawing on an orange playfully. The activity of the children showed that playful dispositions made the children collaborative, empowered, and creative global citizens (Mardell et al., 2016).

As play-based learning turned out to be effective, play can be a powerful tool to develop children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical abilities. Through play, the children can build process disciplinary knowledge, critical thinking skills, collaborative capacities, etc. To meet this end, the schoolyards in Finland have been endowed with playful learning environments (PLEs) for the improvement of literacy skills of the children through play (Granada, 2016).

In Malaysia, a large number of pre-primary teachers are positive in their perceptions about the significance of play for developing the literacy skills of pre-primary children (Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali, 2013). But still, a fair number of teachers face challenges in the implementation of play-based pedagogy for a lack of proper knowledge of the tenet, lack of resources, a proper environment, and finally, sufficient training on play-based pedagogy (Bakar et al., n.d.).

Play, even after being proven as very effective, it is still very difficult to make room for play-based learning in schools in Denmark. It is formidable to break the currently structured

teaching-learning processes existing in most of the schools also in Denmark of the differences of opinion among the educators regarding the selection of approaches of practices and the nature of play. To the educators who view play as a central pathway for learning resources like time, space and materials can seem in short supply (Hyvonen, 2011). While another group of educators who think the play is silly and off-task emphasize efficient coverage of the curriculum. Therefore, to create and operationalize the pedagogy of play, the researchers under a research initiative carried out by Project Zero tried to use a systematic approach to play-based learning needs to develop a school culture where the play will be celebrated, viewed, and understood as a powerful tool (Mardell et al., 2016).

Teachers' Perception in Bangladesh Context

According to article 31 of UNCRC, play is a fundamental right of children. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that a child should have open- play for at least sixty minutes a day for his physical and mental growth but the scene is not as inspiring as expected. Similarly is the case in Bangladesh where plays are disappearing from schools and early education of the pressure of homework, extra care for study, etc. (Sharif, 2014). As such, child psychologists and ECD educators say that school classrooms and playgrounds have to be transformed as a place for children's social and cognitive development (Farrell, 2019).

Pre-primary education through play-based pedagogy is a new concept in the ECE program and Bangladesh is moving forward with this concepts of pre-primary education only from last few years. The concept of play-based pedagogy to achieve the early literacy skills for the children is new to the teachers, educators and even to the parents. According to Das (2021), play based teaching learning infrastructures as well as teachers with play-based pedagogical knowledge are not available as much as required (Alam, 2022). Yet, the government pre-primary classroom teachers are teaching the early grade children with play-based pedagogy with various limitations. Along with sufficient play materials and supportive classroom

environment, the dearth of qualified teachers on play-based pedagogy are some of the factors to materialize this method of teaching learning. However, with various support different government organizations like MoWCA, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, including many NGOs, INGOs, donor agencies, and BRAC IED have the government pre-primary teachers are imparting play-based teaching to achieve the vital literacy skills of the thousands of pre-primary children now in all over the country with considerable success.

To implement the play-based pedagogy for developing the literacy skills of pre-primary children effectively, the perceptions of the teachers need to be well-defined and structured. To make the pre-primary teachers competent and grow their expertise in teaching with play pedagogy, it is to find out the perceptions of the teachers of the pre-primary level. BRAC, the pioneer of developing play-based pedagogy through its Play Lab model since the 1990s, has made a giant stride in developing of curriculum for early literacy skills for millions of children in Afghanistan, Liberia, the Philippines, Tanzania, Uganda, and Bangladesh. The Play Lab model revolves around five key developmental domains: language development, fine and gross-motor development, cognitive development, social-emotional development, and self-regulation. A recent study of Brac's Play Lab model has several significant findings of which play was one key finding was children's developmental outcomes. Play Labs reduced gaps between children's outcomes (Early, 2020; Malayankandy, 2014)

The importance of play is immense and is spirally increasing as for more stress on homework and academic success. Recess has been disappearing, schools are being established in housing apartments without a playground. But as per UNCRC article 31 ensures children's right to play. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggested sixty minutes of open-ended play every day for children for their balanced development. That's why child psychologists and educators deemed the school playground as an important place for children's social and cognitive development. In Bangladesh, majority of the government primary schools have playgrounds.

The teachers need to utilize the playground properly to develop the early literacy skills of the pre-primary children. The impacts of using playgrounds – increase the attendance rate, and improve the psychological and mental health of the children. Research shows that the attendance rate of children increases due to having playgrounds in the schools.

The implementation of play-based education to develop literacy skills, and a supportive classroom environment is interrelated. In pre-primary classes, children need different types of support and assistance to move forward with the ongoing engagement of the children for literacy development through play (Monteiro et al., 2021). In this regard, teachers are the key persons to provide active support for the acquiring of specific learning outcomes. Teachers need to create a supportive classroom environment in which children can feel comfortable and joyous atmosphere; children do not feel humiliated and have negative repercussions of any mistake or failure. Teachers' precise and in-depth perceptions on play-based pedagogy are very important to adopt different techniques and tools to ensure the developmental skills of the children (Harris, n.d.). But in government primary schools, the teachers still are not very aware of using the play-based pedagogy, and lack of knowledge on its proper usages are the deterrents in achieving the literacy skills of the children (Ali et al., 2011). In this regard, the issue of training pre-primary teachers on play-based pedagogy relating to literacy skills development should get special emphasis. The teachers have great roles in implementing the play-based approach as it requires the choices and appropriate use of the right resources and play materials. They have to create a motivating, engaging, stress-free, and enjoyable classroom environment for play and learning (Rahman et al., 2020).

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research follows the inductive process where a researcher is set to explore the meanings and insights in a given situation. In this type of research, a range of data is collected and analyzed with techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews (Kielmann et al., n.d.; MacDonald, 2012). The proposed study is based on the design of exploratory research to understand the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy for the development of literacy skills of pre-primary children in Bangladesh. The approach or design of the research will be qualitative.

Research Site

Since this is an educational research designed to understand the perceptions of pre-primary teachers about the importance of play-based pedagogy in developing literacy skills of preprimary children, the government primary schools from both Dhaka's north and south city corporation areas where pre-primary classes are available had been selected as the research site.

Research Participants

The study population was the teachers of government primary schools from Dhaka city teaching the pre-primary class. Total 06 teachers were selected for an In-Depth Interview (IDI), 02 classroom observations were made and 6 teachers participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Participants Selection Procedure

A total of 12 participants -06 pre-primary school teachers from government primary schools in Dhaka North and South City Corporation were selected for the In-Depth interviews; 02

classroom observations of the 2 teachers among the IDI participants were made with a checklist to see the real situation of the teacher's perception about the play-based teaching-learning activities of the pre-primary children. A total of 6 teachers participated in the FGD. The teachers were selected purposively. Schools were chosen based on the convenience of the researcher. The respondents were selected on their willingness and consent.

Data Collection Tool

Three types of tools were used in the study which are as follows:

In-Depth Interview (IDI) guideline

FGD guidelines, and

Classroom Observation checklist

Data Collection Method and Procedure

Participants have been explained the process of the IDI and FGD and Classroom observation. Rapport was built before conducting the interview. With permission, the conversation was recorded for data. Detail and insightful notes were collected as well. As data collection tools- IDI, FGD, and Classroom Observation Checklist were used in the study. A total of 6 IDIs of the government primary teachers were part of In-Depth Interview sessions. They answered questions about the effectiveness and impacts of play-based teaching-learning activities to help the development of literacy skills of pre-primary children. The IDIs were recorded by audio recorder with permission. Besides, a checklist was developed to observe the classroom performance of the teachers. For the FGD there was an unstructured questionnaire; and the IDIs, as well as the FGD sessions, were a 40-50-minute session. From the IDI participants, 02 teachers were chosen upon consent to observe the classroom practices in their respective schools.

Data Management and Analysis

Data were collected with a developed IDI questionnaire, FGD guideline, and classroom observation tool based on a Likert scale questionnaire and data were coded, transcribed, and translated into English from Bangla. Next, the data were aligned with the research questions and sub-questions and, also into 3 themes so that the targeted outcomes of the study could be presented in clear and more understandable formats. The data were analyzed with the qualitative approach. A content analysis technique was followed. The data collected was archived with step by step process and a data management checklist was maintained (Sada & Maldonado, 2014; Gionis, 2013). After scrutiny of the accuracy and completeness of the raw data, the participants' answers found in short notes from the IDIs were transcribed and rewritten in narrative form. Then, reading and memoing were done to get an initial sense of the data. The data from the FGD and the classroom observations were also transcribed in the same process. After that, the data were analyzed in a step-by-step process and then categorized into topics and themes, and specific patterns. Lastly, data were interpreted as an attempt to understand the meanings of the findings by looking for concepts relevant to the topic, consistent themes, and findings that prove the theory (MOHAJAN, 2018). Finally, the findings were presented in descriptive form according to the themes.

Validity & Reliability

The data collected were triangulated for testing the authenticity. A field test of the tools was conducted. The guidelines for the IDIs, FGD, and the classroom observation checklist were validated checking by the experts before using the tools.

Ethical Issues

Ethical principles were strictly followed and were necessary to clarify under what conditions the research had been carried out. Approval was taken from the ethical committee of BRAC

IED, BRAC University. Before carrying out the study, the teachers of the selected schools were requested over the mobile phone to seek permission for the IDIs, classroom observation, and the FGD. They were notified in detail about the study- context of the study, purpose, objectives of carrying out the study, the reason for approaching them, inclusion criteria of the faculty members, researcher's profile, etc. Once their consent was received, the researcher then conducted the IDIs. Only those who are willing and interested will be selected for the study. Besides, 02 teachers from the IDIs participants were selected upon their consent randomly for the classroom observations. All participants were assured that their privacy would be given utmost importance and that no personal details would be disclosed publicly in any way. If any participant felt uncomfortable answering any question it was skipped. If a participant was unwilling or unable to finish the IDI, then their wishes had to be given priority. No information regarding the study was knowingly withheld. The researcher would not share the fact that he/she had a prior connection with either teachers or schools as that might have influenced the answers of the respondents (Simms & Erwin, 2021).

Limitations of the Study

There was difficulty in extracting the real data or scenario of the study due to fear or ignorance of the teachers that they were seen not to use the play-based pedagogy. The play-based pedagogy is relatively new in Bangladesh and the teachers were not long experienced. As a result, their views could not be verified with other teachers experienced with play-based pedagogy and enough documents and literature could not be analyzed for the purpose.

Chapter IV: Findings & Discussion

Findings

The study was carried out with the view of extracting the perceptions of the pre-primary classroom teachers about the play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of the early grade children in Bangladesh. The study was designed with 6 IDIs, 2 Classroom observations, and one FGD of the pre-primary classroom teachers.

The results have been presented in 3 major thematic areas:

1. Perceptions of the teachers about the literacy skills of the children of pre-primary level in Bangladesh.
2. The practice of the teachers in the classroom to implement the play-based curriculum in government primary schools.
3. The challenges and barriers faced by the teachers in the implementation of the play-based curriculum to enhance the literacy skills of the children of pre-primary level in Bangladesh.

Demographic Information

For this study, a total of twelve preschool teachers for IDI and FGD were selected as participants from two different Government Primary Schools situated in Dhaka city. Of the participants 10 were female and 02 were male between the age range of 30 to 35 years old. The majority of them had higher educational qualifications, nine of them had completed a Master's degree, two of them held Bachelor's Degree certificate and the other participant held Higher Secondary Certificate. All the participants who participated in the IDIs and FGD were experienced in providing early childhood education for an average of 8-9 years. A total of 11 teachers received 15 days of pre-primary training after joining the school. All the 12 teachers received subject-based training at different times and 03 teachers also completed the M.A. in

Ed. And B. Ed. and Dip. Ed course respectively. None of them had had any separate training on play-based pedagogy during their teaching career so far.

Theme: 1 Knowledge of teacher about the use of play-based approach to developing literacy skills for pre-primary children

The first theme above has been divided into some sub-themes to get a clear understanding of the knowledge and perceptions of the participants. The result of the first theme has been analyzed below:

Teachers' knowledge about the early literacy skills of pre-primary level children

The first thematic topic of the study was to explore the knowledge of the participants about the literacy skills of the early grade Children. All the participants were found to be well aware of the definition and idea of the literacy skills of the children. The respondents told that early literacy skills referred to children's fundamental knowledge of the Bangla (mother tongue) alphabet, numbers, and the preliminary ability of speaking and writing mechanics. According to the majority of the respondent, early literacy skills meant the knowledge of the alphabet or letters, the ability to read the letters by seeing the flashcards and letter charts, know and reading the numbers from 1-20. One respondent replied:

"Early literacy means the skills of reading the alphabet and letters, speaking by listening and writing by drawing hands or moving hands over the letters." (In-Depth-Interview # 3, 14-2-23)

Besides, some respondents referred to early literacy skills as the ability of a student to introduce oneself. Through early literacy skills, a child learns the capacity of speaking socially differently from the family atmosphere. The children learn social manners and behaviors through early literacy skills. A respondent pointed out that:

"Through early literacy, a child can introduce oneself by telling the names of himself, one's parents introduction and also be able to tell the names of the nearby classmates along with learning the school environment." (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 14-2-23)

Another respondent told:

"Early literacy skills will make a child able to introduce his/her parents and friends, know how to speak formally in an institution outside of the family along with the capability of listening, speaking, reading, and writing the alphabet." (In-Depth-Interview # 2, 14-2-23)

Similar to the IDI respondents, most of the respondents of the FGD also expressed the same ideas and thoughts about the early literacy of the children. One respondent reiterated that:

"Early literacy will enable a child to introduce oneself accordingly by telling his name, parents' names, learn how to hold the pen and pencil, know about the safe and secured atmosphere of the school along with the social etiquettes and manners, etc." (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

The majority of the FGD members believed that a child would be able to read the letters of the flashcard, letter chart, and words of two letters along with knowing the letters' proper pronunciation, holding the pen correctly, being able to write the letters by tracing and drawing lines independently, etc. Early literacy skills also cover the ability to draw lines, different shapes, and imaginary pictures and images. The classroom observation also reflected the views of the respondents on IDIs and FGD. From the two classroom observation, it is noticed that the teachers were well aware of the outcomes of the early literacy skills which can be achieved through play-based pedagogy.

Teachers' view on play based learning approach to developing literacy skills

The perceptions of the teachers about the play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of the pre-primary level children were the main points to understand from the study. All 6 respondents of the IDI opined with insightful answers. Most of the respondents viewed play-based pedagogy as teaching and learning through meaningful guided play. The children would learn through play and fun with play materials, and teaching learning materials. An IDI respondent reflected:

"Play-based learning means learning through play. What the children learn through four corners such as the book corner, block corner, and Aki Buki (scribbling) corner, etc. means play-based learning. Playing with blocks, four edges objects, three edges objects, real objects, and images and pictures are the tools by which the pre-primary children can learn; and this learning is very effective and useful." (In-Depth-Interview # 2, 14-2-23)

Most of the respondents found that play-based pedagogy makes the children learning of basic skills of reading and speaking of the alphabet, numbers and symbols, pictures, and images through using guided and independent plays. Two respondents also expressed the perception that play-based pedagogy has a positive outcome in developing the literacy skills of pre-primary level children.

A respondent said:

"Children enjoy this method of teaching very much. Play-based pedagogy is an effective method of teaching." (In-Depth-Interview # 5, 14-2-23)

Again, all the participants of the FGD expressed similar perceptions about play-based pedagogy. One FGD participant told

“Children learn how to pronounce the letters first and gradually they proceed to pronounce the word. Another respondent said that by tracing, they could learn how to write the numbers.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Rhyme presentation in a playful manner can make children learn numbers. A respondent showed how he could teach numbers 1 to 10 by teaching rhymes like:

“This way we write one, this way two / This way eat we, this way we lay.” Or shapes of mathematics by telling stories, for example: *“The king of the square looks like the Square / The queen of triangle looks like the Triangle.”* (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Two IDI respondents opined against play-based learning as it diverted the mind of the children. They found it a problem to teach and play in the same room as the number of the student was big, and some children remain engrossed in playing. In this regard, one IDI respondent replied:

“It becomes difficult to maintain discipline in the classroom with a large class size and arranging the play materials.” (In-Depth-Interview # 5, 14-2-23)

Both teachers in the classroom showed their knowledge and positive thought about using the play-based approach while teaching the learners in the classroom. The scores of both the teachers were found very encouraging and the teachers tried their level best to make the children learn through assigned plays with learning outcomes as the given instruction in the teachers' guide.

Views about the benefits of early literacy skills for children of pre-primary level

Regarding the benefits of the literacy skills of the children at the pre-primary level, all the respondents provided very insightful observations. The respondents observed that the children attending the pre-primary level would face no problem with recognizing and reading the

alphabet and letters when getting enrolled in the primary level. They would be able to read words with two letters with proper pronunciation. One IDI respondent told:

"When these children will go to primary school, they will have no problem in recognizing the alphabet, reading and writing them correctly. For example, when they will play in the field, they will be able to segregate the sounds of the word 'Ball' (in Bengali বল) with 'B' (ব) and 'L' (ল), and read the letters individually." (In-Depth-Interview # 1, 13-2-23)

The pre-primary level students get another advantage which is the ability of writing. In the pre-primary level, children are taught writing of the alphabet by drawing by hand with different techniques and methods like tracing, practicing repeatedly by the teachers with longer time and attention, etc. According to an IDI respondent:

"In the primary level, the teachers don't spare much time for developing the handwriting ability of the new students as they are to look after other subjects and classes as well." (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-23).

Views about the plays used in the curriculum for the development of early literacy skills for children of pre-primary level

The views of the teachers about the plays adopted to use in the pre-primary curriculum were discussed. Most of the participants were able to say of the two types of play- a) Guided plays, and b) Free plays. The majority of the FGD and IDI respondents could tell the names of 8-10 plays out of the 20 plays given in the Teachers' Guide. One respondent, for example, mentioned the names of some of the games: 'Flying of Birds', 'Rail Cart Zhik, Zhik', 'Malago Mala', 'Boat Game', 'Knowing the Letters, Kanamachi Vho Vho', 'Ful Toka', 'Open ti Bioscope', 'Ttiching Bitching Chiching Cha', etc." (IDI Respondent 1, 13-2-23).

Besides, for free play, there are 'Blocks', 'Puzzles', 'Spring', 'Slipper', 'Riders', 'Cooking Utensils', etc. There are also plays in which the children play in the open field if they are taken into the fields.

It was observed that the teachers used the plays during their class activities but not with an emphasis or focus on the learning outcomes of the plays. They let the children play the games just as an activity, not relate it with the learning outcomes of reading or writing lessons as they admitted not to know play-based pedagogy much for lack of training as well as time problem.

One IDI respondent informed that they could not make the children play the game, 'Kanamachi Who Who', or the 'Sand Corner, in the classroom as there is not enough room suitable for playing in the city environment situation. He observed:

"There is the possibility of an accident with play, 'Kanamachi Who Who', for lack of space and pushing each other." (In-Depth-Interview # 2, 14-2-23)

They usually follow 12-15 guided plays given in the Teachers' guide by the NCTB. Regarding outdoor play or free play, all the teachers felt a common problem which is the difficulty of managing or tackling many children at a time.

Opinion about a supportive classroom environment for early literacy development

The concepts and ideas of the participants on the supportive classroom and its role in the implementation of the play-based pedagogy were tried to be explored by the study. Regarding the supportive classroom environment, all the respondents emphasized a large classroom with enough ventilation and lighting facilities, neatness, availability of sufficient play materials, well-equipped teaching aids, etc. One IDI participant said:

"The large space is important as the number of students is higher than the targeted number which is around 30. At present, one respondent opined that the size of the

classroom in which she teaches is only 15 x 12 or 180 sq. ft. which cannot accommodate her 60-80 students.” (In-Depth-Interview # 3, 20-2-23)

There should be enough play materials in a supportive classroom so that every child can play upon their wish. One FGD respondent opined that:

“For a supportive classroom, the teachers emphasized the decoration of the classroom with furniture, projector, and wall paintings and illustrations also necessary. The lessons, games, and videos shown on the projector are loved by the children, and experienced by respondents.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Regarding the importance of a supportive classroom environment for early literacy development most of the respondents claimed that learning would enhance and get smooth in a supportive classroom environment. The well-decorated and congenial environment of the classroom was also liked much by the children. Children were seen to get attentive in receiving the lessons and become interested in playing if a supportive classroom was provided. One IDI respondent told that -

“If the classroom has a supportive environment, a child will learn with joy; he will not forget lessons. His fear and hesitation will be removed and more interested in coming to school as he will develop a sense of belonging to the school where a child will be able to play with fun with friends and peers.” (In-Depth-Interview # 3, 20-2-23).

Another respondent added that –

“Some children don't want to go home because of the nice environment of the classroom; they want to play more even after the closure of the school hours.” (In-Depth-Interview # 5, 23-2-23)

In the Focus Group Discussion, the participants also expressed the same views as the IDIs respondents. Open, spacious, free flowing of air and light, enough play materials, and a well-decorated room with painted walls with nice illustrations, etc. are essential for a supportive classroom environment according to their views.

Receiving training on play-based pedagogy by the teachers

The teachers who are now in service of teaching pre-primary classes in Government primary schools did not receive any training on play-based pedagogy since their appointment except for a short orientation of 15 days after the appointment. All the IDI respondents were appointed as fresher and they were provided an orientation of 15 days when they were given some elementary ideas about play-based pedagogy. One respondent told:

“Now, they have forgotten those concepts and teach the students with their own experience and methods.” (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-23)

They are not well aware of the real knowledge of using the play aligning the curriculum and learning outcomes of the plays given in the Teachers' guide. One FGD respondent suggested:

“It would be beneficial for them if they are given another training only on play-based pedagogy.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

The scenario was found to be true in the two classrooms that were observed. Teachers were using the games randomly without following the learning outcomes of the lesson related to the play. This is the major weakness of the teachers noticed from the classroom observations through the perceptions of the teachers are well clear about the play-based pedagogy and its benefits in developing literacy skills in early grade.

Theme: 2 Practice of play-based approach to developing early literacy skills for early-grade children

Time spent with children for their development of reading and writing skills

The 2nd thematic area of the study was to get a picture about to see the practice of a play-based approach to developing early literacy skills for early-grade children. In this regard, how much time do the teachers usually spend with the children every day for their development of reading and writing skills? All the respondents told that there were 25 minutes allotted for pre-reading and 20 minutes for pre-writing in the curriculum and class routine. In reply to the supplementary question, whether the allotted time was sufficient for delivering the assigned lessons on the routine, the majority of the respondents replies positively. Two respondents told that 25 minutes for pre-reading, listening, and speaking and 20 minutes for pre-writing is always not possible. Sometimes they spend 60 or more minutes for many children cannot hold pencils properly. They remarked:

"The stipulated time of 25 minutes for pre-reading and 20 minutes for pre-writing is not possible always as many children don't pay heed to the reading lesson as they remain involved more in play or many children cannot hold a pencil properly, they need to provide hands-on support with additional time." (In-Depth-Interview # 4 & 6, 20-2-23/ 23-2-23)

Thus pre-primary teachers are to provide support by making them know how to hold a pencil or pen in their hand and how to trace the alphabet. They cannot sometimes follow the schedule of practicing the pre-reading and pre-writing activities. Another problem has been indicated by three respondents related to using extra khata or a notebook. The guardians created pressure to follow the kindergarten system of giving homework in another notebook or khata along with the Aki Buki khata. One IDI respondent remarked:

"The guardians put pressure to use additional khata or notebook for homework for their children to develop pre-writing skills." (In-Depth-Interview # 6, 23-2-23)

Strategies used to teach the children reading and writing skills

Regarding the strategies and teaching methods of how they teach reading or writing skills to the children, all the respondents replied that they follow the instructions of the Teachers' Guide(TG). For example, to develop writing skills, they used plays beside the exercise khata– "Aki Buki" (writing practice khata) along with providing colored pencils. For pre-reading, they used, 'Letter Charts', 'Flash Cards' etc. One respondent replied:

"Along with using plays, for example, 'Birds Fly,' they use 'Letter Charts', 'Flash Cards', etc. and 'Aki Buki' for pre-writing skill development." (In-Depth-Interview #2,14-2-23)

Besides, one IDI respondent explained that they use the method of 'Sentence- word- letters' for teaching the letters by reading. While for teaching numbers, the concept was followed: 'Near-far, large-small, tall and short.' One FGD respondent supplemented the concept of teaching numbers using rhymes also, for example:

"One went fishing / Two went with him / Three sat and drive the boat /

With the book in hand / Four fell from the tree/ Five sat and cried." (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Even after providing support or help if a student fails to understand, they make the students draw hands by showing tracing. According to one respondent of the IDI, he used songs or rhymes to teach writing skills by showing the movement of his hand and singing:

"We write one in this way, two in this way

We eat this way, we lie in this way." (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-23)

Besides, they use sticks to teach numbers. Again, the teachers motivate the children to make stories with imaginative power using zero text story book. Besides, one FGD respondent also mentioned one technique of using songs to inspire the children to improve their literacy skills:

“The teachers sometimes sing songs to draw their attention to studies or remove their dull and gloomy mood.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Use of play materials to teach children literacy skills

As to the use of materials for teaching aids in the classroom, all the teachers opined more or less the same that they used blocks, blocks cook-sheet, swings, slippers, dolls, cooking utensils, sticks, portraits of animals, flowers, fruits and other natural scenery in the walls. One respondent said:

“They use blocks, boats, buttons, seeds, etc. for making learning numbers. Again, for free play, they use boats, horses, swings etc.” (In-Depth-Interview # 2, 14-2-23).

All the teachers informed me that they used plays and pictures to develop reading and writing skills. One of the respondents told that:

“The children learn to read and write letters by playing Ludu and Flash Cards.” (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 22-2-2023)

Another respondent supplemented that:

“A pictorial Sundarbans has been created by the artist to introduce the animals and trees to the students and they learn the names and figures with fun and joy.” (In-Depth-Interview # 1, 13-2-2023)

All the teachers acknowledged that all the 20 games given in the curriculum are related to learning the alphabet and numbers. One respondent said,

“Who do you want as your friend?”, “Which bird flies and which doesn't?”, “Which thing is soft and which is hard?”, “Bag full of Mysteries”, and “Rong Choa”, are some of the plays by which the children are taught the alphabet and letters.” (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-2023)

Another respondent added:

"Sometimes the teachers make playing objects with papers, seeds of fruits, rice and lentil grains, and beans, etc." (In-Depth-Interview # 6, 23-2-2023 #6).

The above views are supported by all the Focus Group Discussion participants. They told that they teach numbers by using Letter cards, Number Cards, Letter Ludu, Puzzle, Blocks, Birds made of Coconut leaves, tamarind seeds, etc. They experienced that drawing pictures is one of the most interesting subjects to the children.

Opinions about children's interaction with books, prints, or other materials

All the respondents agreed that the children got happy to see and receive the books, prints, or other materials. They get immensely happy, especially when they receive the khata "Aki Buki" at the time of admission. One of the IDI respondents remarked,

"The children learn making of fish, butterfly, etc. by the paper taken from the khata and feel great pleasure." (In-Depth-Interview # 1, 13-2-2023)

Most of the IDI respondents also observed that children liked books with color images, illustrations, paintings, etc. They also liked the printed pages of the storybooks with pictures and shows positive reactions. One respondent observed:

"The interesting thing is that the children make stories by seeing the pictures from the printed books." (In-Depth-Interview # 5, 23-2-2023)

Only one respondent found:

"Some children, on the contrary, show attraction for the toys more than the printed books." (In-Depth-Interview # 6, 23-2-2023)

Views about child responses when they were not provided with play materials or taught by plays related to literacy development

Most of the respondents of the IDIs found that children used to get unhappy and gloomy if they were not given play materials. Sometimes children start fighting if they did not get the play materials of their choice. They could not wait for the time of starting the play by the teacher.

One of the respondents said:

"If the play materials are not given, they show an irritating mood, they feel melancholy and despondent." (In-Depth-Interview # 3,14-2-23)

The respondents experienced a variety of irritating and unusual behaviors of children like nagging the teacher, pulling off the dress of teacher to let them play, or making the teacher hostage by saying not to come to school the next day. One IDI respondent noticed one negative aspect of play:

"Some children remain indifferent to the lesson as they remain engrossed to play rather than paying attention to the lesson." (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-2023).

On the contrary, in Focus Group Discussion, it was learned that the children would enjoy the lessons if the teacher used play materials. When they were allowed to play, they showed a very positive attitude to the lessons and became very happy if they were engaged in any activity after playing. For playing the children would come in contact with anything in the nearby or known environment which would attract them. They could see, compare, assess, and learn applying their knowledge and critical thinking capacity. One FGD respondent expressed his opinion:

"Children can compare with that object the lesson they learned or see. For example, when a child learns, "Aa te Ajogar", or "Aa te Aam", they try to relate the letters and alphabet seeing any flower or different objects. As a result, their critical thinking capacity grows." (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23).

Through this process of learning by playing, the monotony of teaching and learning could be removed from the mind of the children.

Theme: 3 Factors influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills

Challenges to teaching children through play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills

The third thematic area was about the factors influencing the implementation of play-based pedagogy for developing literacy skills in early grades. The IDI respondents provided very realistic and well-conceived factors that influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop the early literacy skills of pre-primary level children. Almost all the IDI respondents highlighted the problem of a small size classroom with a large number of students as a major challenge.

One IDI respondent revealed that:

“Space problem is a big problem. The play materials cannot be distributed among the children for lack of space. The Four Corners as per the directions of the Teachers’ Guide cannot be arranged properly.” (In-Depth-Interview # 1, 13-2-23)

The FGD respondents also expressed a similar experience of the lack of space for a large number of students. An FGD respondent replied:

“The play materials are difficult to divide among the children due to the lack of sufficient space in the classroom. The children cannot sit in the four corners properly.”
(Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

It is very difficult to accommodate a large number of children in the classroom. In the majority of schools in Dhaka city, there are more than 30, even 60-70 students on average are there in a pre-primary classroom. From classroom Observation, in a school of old Dhaka, more than 212

children were having two sections – one for boys and one for girls.” (Classroom Observation # 2, 20-2-2023)

The IDI respondents of the study have identified the insufficiency of play materials as another major challenge. One IDI respondent has told that:

“Shortage of toys and play materials in the classroom is a big problem.” (In-Depth-Interview # 2, 14-2-23)

From the two Classroom observations, the problem of insufficient toys and play materials has been noticed. The teacher could not provide all the children with the toys they desired to play with because a number of students demanded the same toys. Besides, many toys are lost or get missing, and some toys and play materials are broken or damaged in the course of time. One FGD respondent noticed:

“The management of toys is a problem as the children take the toys and materials in the house. Consequently, the number of toys gets reduced at the middle or end of the year.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Next, both the IDI and FGD participants mentioned the one fixed teacher for the pre-primary class was another challenge in the proper implementation of the play-based pedagogy. One FGD respondent said:

“One fixed teacher for the pre-primary classroom is a big problem. It becomes very difficult for a single teacher to continue the class for 2 and half hours. It takes time to maintain discipline in the classroom and to handle or manage the children. Besides, this pre-primary teacher has to take classes also in the regular primary section of the school.” (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-2023)

The IDI respondents also validated the problem as identified by the FGD respondents. An IDI respondent said:

"It is difficult for a single teacher to manage a pre-primary classroom for long 2 and half hours at a stretch. A pre-primary teacher needs to take care of the dresses of the children and feed their breakfast sometimes as many children come to school after getting up from sleep. Moreover, the pre-primary needs to take classes in the regular primary section of the school also." (In-Depth-Interview # 4, 20-2-23)

The respondents of both IDIs and FGD also mentioned some other environmental and management challenges, such as the period of class hour-2 ½ hours is a rather long time for some children. It becomes difficult for the teachers to hold them in the classroom. Even plays cannot hold them; they want to go home. An FGD respondent observed:

"Some children fall asleep in the classroom. Some children pester to go home or the mother." (Focus Group Discussion, 22-2-23)

Opinions about teachers' training for developing the capacity of the teachers

As to training, the respondents in the Focus Group Discussion, again replied in the same tone as the IDI respondents. All the respondents of FGD and IDIs demanded that they should be given hands-on training on guided plays so that they can make the children more involved with the plays aligned with learning outcomes of the curriculum to develop the literacy skills of the pre-primary level learners. Some important suggestions have been incorporated in the recommendation section of the thesis.

Suggestions to make the existing curriculum more play-based focus to develop the literacy skills of children

In the last question, most of the respondents of IDI answered that the curriculum of the 4+ children should be a little bit lighter than the curriculum of the 5+ children. One respondent said:

"It would be enough for them to come to the school regularly. There might be little activities on reading, writing, and listening. The time frame for 4+ children should be 2 hours. The small children would cry; even toys would not be enough for them to hold in the classroom." (In-Depth-Interview #1, 13-2-23)

Another respondent opined that:

"For the 4+ children, the number of games has to be increased. The quantity of toys for the 4+ children has to be ensured so that the children would not quarrel about getting the toys of their choice at the same time." (In-Depth-Interview # 2 & 3, 14-2-23)

Two of the IDI respondents observed that:

"For 5+ children, the number of plays is enough, it should not be increased, rather the number of teachers should be increased."(In-Depth-Interview#4 & 6, 14-2-23/23-2-23)

Discussion

The findings of the study were interpreted to find the answers to the research questions to get an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions about the play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of pre-primary level children. The insights obtained through the findings of this study are discussed and presented under three broad themes.

Theme: 1 Perception of the teachers about the literacy skills of the children of pre-primary level in Bangladesh.

Play is one of the most important and natural elements to mold the life of a child. The perceptions of the pre-primary teachers on the literacy skills of early-grade children have been

analyzed from different angles and perspectives in the study. Having a clear perception is a prerequisite to delivering one's duty and responsibility, the objectives and goals of the job, determining the strengths and weaknesses, and requirements of developing or overcoming the obstacles in the mission of achieving the outcomes of the work. The respondents provided their detailed views about their understanding of the importance and necessity of the literacy skills of pre-primary children.

The first thematic area under research question 1, the knowledge and views of the teachers on the play-based pedagogy and its role in developing the early literacy skills of the pre-primary level children were found very optimistic in spirit. The respondents showed keen interest to apply the approach of play-based learning in teaching the lessons. From the IDI and FGD data trend, it is clear that the teachers are well aware of the early literacy skills of the preschoolers. The respondents had a basic knowledge of the benefits and advantages of acquiring the skills like pre-reading, pre-writing, and learning numerical senses. The pre-primary teachers follow the instructions of NCTB's teachers' guide to teach literacy-related lessons. They put sincere efforts to use the plays given in the Teachers' Guide to making the children acquire early literacy skills. The findings of the study are supported by similar studies in different countries. For example, In Malaysia, the teachers' responses to play-based pedagogy were found to be positive but they were not trained in play-based pedagogy; as a result, they struggled to implement the approach fully. The study by Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali (2013), identified the necessity of providing teachers with knowledge and skills on the use of play in their teaching approach. But it is not sure how far the efforts of the teachers are successful to apply the plays with proper pedagogical inputs as most of the teachers were found from their responses not to have appropriate skills for themselves.

The play-based pedagogy is proven to be effective in developing the literacy skills like language, and social and psychological communication skills along with pre-reading and

writing of the alphabet, letters, and numbers. To consider the importance of play, the Government of Malaysia also emphasized a play-based approach in the teaching and learning process for National Preschool Curriculum. From a Malaysian perspective, the use of language with all four forms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, learning about numbers and counting, creating and expressing ideas and thoughts, and solving problems, etc. is considered as early grade literacy skills (Haney & Bissonnette, 2011; Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali, 2013). Early childhood is the high time for the development of language literacy skills and for this social interactions with peers, and adults outside the family persons is essential. The perceptions of the respondents also imply that they teach with the same aims and objectives of developing the literacy skills of the pre-primary level children.

In preschool years, play is highly potential for the children to be engaged in meaningful context for learning basic literacy skills. Different studies have affirmed that preschoolers develop literacy skills faster and more smoothly through repetitive activities during play. According to Vygotsky and Piaget, play is a vehicle for socialization and development language skills. Early-grade children learn during play and in the pre-primary level context, a teacher plays the role of an assistant or facilitator for providing support to a child. It has become clear from the observation and data analysis from the IDI and FGD that majority of the respondents are well aware that learning through play is an effective approach. The role and responsibilities of the teachers for implementing the play-based pedagogy and its significance for developing the early literacy skills of the pre-primary children were clearly understood by respondents.

Though the respondents were highly positive about the usefulness of the play-based pedagogy, it has been learned from the study that they lack training in the application of the plays. A study in Malaysia recommended the building of the teachers' capacity for implementing play-based pedagogy through intervention programs and collaboration among the education authorities (Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza Ali, 2013). Hong Kong also adopted the policy of teaching

through play as the core element of curriculum and pedagogy for the early grade students. In this regard, the Hong Kong authority also arranged training to equip the teachers with hands-on training (Wong et al., 2011). Similarly, in the study, it has been rightly pointed out that they need more training to be properly equipped with knowledge and skills in play-based pedagogy. The teachers of pre-primary will be able to align the plays of the curriculum and engage the children in the plays they like during the teaching. Moreover, the teachers will learn from the hands-on training of the play-based pedagogy to adapt the techniques and strategies to make the plays interesting to the children. Teachers' expertise in using play to link with literacy skills is the key to making play-based pedagogy operate smoothly.

To implement the play-based pedagogy, the teacher's support, and encouragement to the children is highly important as early literacy is developed naturally as well as adults' support and guidance, and the teaching favorable environment. Numerous studies have elicited the point that play improves literacy (Christie & Roskos, 2009). Play can best promote literacy skills through a supportive classroom environment where sufficient play materials are arranged to enhance literacy skills. In New Zealand, a supportive classroom is not only a suitable physical classroom and sufficient resources; it also emphasizes the values and the relationships between the teacher and the students because they believe, "the effective teachers don't teach the lesson, they teach the students" (Aung, 2018). A supportive learning environment promotes students' interaction, engagement, and self-confidence. It is learned from the study that the teachers try to value and build relationships with the students for creating a supportive classroom environment; still, there are some gaps and lapses as to a lack of training on play-based pedagogy for developing the literacy skills of the pre-primary children.

Theme: 2 Practice of play-based approach to developing early literacy skills for pre-primary children

In the second thematic area, time management, strategies and techniques used for teaching literacy skills, use of play materials by the teachers, and the reactions of the children to print and other materials were analyzed. The time allocation for pre-primary classes in Bangladesh is 2 and a half hours. And teachers spend 40 to 50 minutes teaching literacy and numeracy skills. The time allocation for literacy and numeracy is enough as it seemed to the teachers. They have given the observation that the teaching of Bangla-the mother tongue and mathematics for numeracy development remain the main focus, so the use of materials and play sometimes do not get the right priority.

Regarding the use of the strategies and techniques for making the children acquire literacy skills, the respondents were found sincere and enthusiastic in using strategies and techniques to ensure different literacy skills like pre-reading, pre-writing, and learning number counting by the children. It has been noticed that the respondents used the science of language teaching pedagogy, "Sentence- word- letter" to make the children learn the alphabet and letters effectively. The teachers also demonstrated their perceptions of motivating the children who lag or are unresponsive in paying attention by helping the children to read or write going to their place. Thus, the respondents contributed to the supportive classroom environment also.

The researchers have come to learn that children at play often develop high-quality oral literacy skills than at normal times (Han et al., 2010). In the study, it is found that children are very inquisitive. They like very much the printed books, and materials of any kind and show deep interest in the illustrations and images on them. The storybooks of zero text make the tiny children curious, thoughtful, and imaginative. Then they begin to create a story by looking at the storybook with zero text. They knit or link one incident to another together with their

classmates or the teacher. This is the development of the children and gives them a very solid foundation of communicative skills. The teachers in the study also noticed that the listening and speaking capacities of the children who are active in playing are naturally improved. Play is highly supportive of literacy development at the pre-primary level of children. Thus the study finds a close relationship between play and emergent literacy of pre-primary learners.

In a study on a group of poor children of 4-5 age in African American, Latino, and white people of different schools, the children who remained engaged with play materials learned classification, enumeration, shapes, patterns, and spatial relations much better than the normal students (Nicholich & Brian, 1981). The study also explored the use of playing with the materials by the respondents in the classroom. The aims of using the play materials for learning the skills, the respondents mentioned the locally available materials like letter cards, flashcards, sticks, cook sheets, buttons, seeds, leaves, dolls, songs, and rhymes in the class to engage the children. Besides, the classroom walls were also painted with portraits of animals, flowers, fruits, and other pictures or sceneries of Sundarbans to make practice and develop the speaking, reading, writing, and spelling of the words and thereby develop the literacy skills of the children. For guided plays, the respondents' views of the 20 plays were found well-conceived. Most of them opined that the plays were executable by them and the children also liked the plays. Only two or three plays for example, 'Kanamachi Vho Vho' were a little bit difficult to use for the short space of the classroom. They also suggested increasing the free play materials which are more liked by the children, such as slippers, swings, and horses.

The children's reactions to books and prints –a sub-question under the second theme, also provide a realistic picture of the child's psychology and inclination to learning. From the responses, it was learned that the children liked any kind of books with pictures or images, or even without text. They started to create stories by looking into the books of zero text having only pictures nicely which indicated their progress in imagination and inquisitive capability

and development of literacy skills. The respondents also could identify that the children get melancholy or depressed not to get to play or the desired play materials. They got highly happy to see when they were allowed to play.

Theme: 3 Factors influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills

Implementing play-based pedagogy is a difficult task as it has many challenges also. Though Bangladesh introduced pre-primary level education not so long ago, there are some challenges to practicing plays for learning. From the study, the challenges identified from the third thematic area were a large number of students, a lack of spacious classrooms, insufficient play materials, and a single teacher in the classroom. A large number of students in the city area government primary schools indicated that the pre-primary level of education is getting popular with parents and children as well. If a large number of students, congested space, and shortage of play materials problems can be managed or solved, the quality of literacy skills of the children will be improved further.

In England, a study found positive effects between play and early learning outcomes in regards to early literacy and language development and early numeracy; yet, play is viewed as a social function with little evidence of cognitive development (Dangerfield, 2017). There the focus of the teachers was primarily on formal tasks such as literacy and numeracy. The narrow conceptualization of play continues to undermine play-based activities in delivering early childhood programs. But to develop the literacy skills of the pre-primary learners through play-based activities, the teachers must understand the interaction of content and pedagogy. Teachers' professionalism and skills in the implementation of the approach have to be elevated. The researchers in India also observe that if the teachers engage the children in symbolic play in the classroom they show better performance in reading and writing in the later stage of primary education (Nicholich & Brian, 1981).

In Malaysia, the play has been pushed out of primary school due to the constant pressure of study. There is no playtime, many schools do not value and think play is a waste of time. Teachers in Malaysia, have found that they do not possess skills in planning and organizing activities in using materials and resources during play activities. The type of schools, academic qualification, and teacher's experience are related to the perceptions of the play-based approach. In Malaysia, the shortage of qualified preschool teachers is acute (Kepol, 2017). But in Bangladesh, the qualification and experience of the teachers is not any problem, the challenge is the proper implementation of a play-based teaching-learning approach. And in this regard, training and utilization of proper resources along with appropriate curriculum are necessary to build pre-primary children's literacy skills.

In England and Malaysia, the training of the teachers to develop the skills and capacity of the teachers has been found an important priority for the better implementation of play-based pedagogy to enhance the literacy skills of pre-primary level children. A number of studies have confirmed that plays are ideal tools to enhance children's narrative abilities by scaffolding to further narrative scope. Researchers have supported the benefits of guided play to increase literacy skills (Han et al., 2010). But to reap the benefits, the learners need scaffolding and for this purpose, the teacher has to cooperate with different roles during the play such as onlooker, co-player, or leader of the play, etc. The curriculum of the government pre-primary schools in Bangladesh incorporated 20 plays for the 5+ children which are closely aligned with literacy and numeracy development. These plays require much expertise and practice for the teachers to be well conversant with and make the children interested to play the games and learn literacy. To this end, the study finds a big challenge that the teachers lack training and how to provide training to the huge number of pre-primary teachers in Bangladesh.

Some research shows that directed and guided play help more children understand and retain compared to learning the same thing with free play. Another study shows that directed and

guided plays bring better results for children than free play (Weisberg et al., 2013). In this regard, the teachers have to be sincere and dexterous in the execution of the plays to develop the literacy and numeracy capabilities of the preschoolers. The teachers have to be aware of the competencies and learning outcomes of the curriculum before conducting the plays. For this, the teachers need hands-on training to make themselves more competent for the purpose.

The respondents provided thoughtful remarks over the introduction of 4+ pre-primary levels going to be introduced by DPE under the curriculum of NCTB with some modifications. They had opined- if 4+ pre-primary level is introduced, the curriculum of the 4+ children should be lighter than the 5+ children curriculum and more play oriented. The number of play activities should be increased for the 4+ children curriculum. While the class hour should be not more than 2 hours. According to all the respondents, regarding the 5+ children curriculum, the number of plays at present given in existing curriculum is alright. If 4+ pre-primary level is introduced there should be 2 teachers in the pre-primary level, all the respondents agreed on the point as it would be a great pressure for a single teacher to continue 2 pre-primary classes.

The findings of the study were interpreted to find the answers to the research questions to get an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions about the play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of pre-primary level children. The insights obtained through the findings of this study are discussed and presented under three broad themes.

Conclusion

In this modern era, the play has an essential role in building up the literacy capacity of the early grade learners to a considerable extent (Weisberg et al., 2013). The study on the teachers' perceptions of the play-based pedagogy and literacy development of the early grade children is very insightful. Significant observations were found that would help implement the approach. The pre-primary stage and curriculum got introduced in Bangladesh in 2014 with a limited scale; now, the pre-primary level has come to a developing stage, and its pros and cons are being studied from different aspects. Since the inception of the pre-primary level in around half of the government primary schools with a single teacher for each school in Bangladesh, it is very pertinent to justify the perceptions of the teachers in the classroom what play-based pedagogy is, and how play-based pedagogy help develop the literacy skills of the early grade children, the use of the play materials and the challenges they face and their possible interventions.

The teachers' perceptions have been analyzed from different angles. They were found to be theoretically aware that a play-based approach to teaching the learner is practical if it is appropriately applied following the instructions. The teachers emphasized hands-on training and its implementation in the classroom, along with many other significant challenges to be addressed to for making the pre-primary level more meaningful. The data found for the study proves that the scope of the pre-primary level has increased significantly. The children and the guardians, especially the mothers, like to put their children into government pre-primary schools to their awareness of the need for foundational learning. The study conducted in Dhaka city only found it gaining popularity among urban parents.

Since the introduction of the pre-primary level in the government primary schools, the teachers were appointed in phases but still needed to receive formal training on play-based teaching-learning methods or approaches. Besides, the lack of required space, large number of students,

supportive classroom environment, shortage of learning materials, etc., pose some challenges in the implementation of the program. The challenges are long-term and short-term and related to policy formulation or adaptation. The study had limitations, yet the findings are expected to motivate further study to extract more ideas and suggestions to make pre-primary education a model in the region. To mitigate and reduce the challenges, some recommendations have been proposed based on the findings of the study.

Recommendations

Pre-primary teachers are to be specially qualified as pre-primary level teaching needs special knowledge and training, and a supportive classroom environment. Following the results of the study and the discussion, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance and ensure the practice of play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of pre-primary level children in Bangladesh:

- To ensure the literacy skills of the pre-primary children, the knowledge and skills of the teachers need to be regularly updated through Continuous Professional Development. Though the teachers expressed their knowledge and interest in play-based pedagogy for developing the literacy skills of early-grade children, they lack the practical experience of using the plays to align with the learning outcomes. Teachers should be provided hands-on practices training to materialize the play-based pedagogy.
- A supportive classroom environment is proven to be important to exercise play activities in the classroom. To ensure a supportive classroom environment, the classroom size should be larger with enough light and airflow, considering the number of students, and decorating the classroom beautifully.
- The play materials have to be increased as per the number of students in the classroom. The materials have to be procured in several sets so that they can be provided to the children as per the requirement.

- Two teachers for the pre-primary level can be engaged to ensure the quality of the pre-primary play-based pedagogy. This is a policy issue and the MoPME and DPE have to think over to take necessary measures.
- Some plays which are unsuitable for small-size classrooms should be replaced in the curriculum and the Teachers' Guide.
- Policy for the pre-primary level may be updated to adapt to the modern concepts of play-based pedagogy for the literacy development of pre-primary children.

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Appendix A. In-Depth-Interview Guideline

Research Topic: Teachers' Perceptions of Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

Interview Date:

Start Time:

End Time:

Section A: Demographic Information

Participant code:	
Teacher's Name:	Teacher's Age:
Educational Qualification:	Name of School:
1 st joining in the Service:	Service Experience:
Training Received:	Duration of Training:

Section B: Knowledge of teacher about the use of play-based approach to developing literacy skills for pre-primary children

1. What is your view about play based learning approach? Please explain.
2. What do you know about the early literacy skills of pre-primary level children?
3. What are the benefits of early literacy skills for children of pre-primary level?
4. What are the plays that the students play in the classroom for developing their literacy skills?
5. What do you mean by a supportive classroom environment?
6. What is the importance of a supportive environment for early literacy development? Please share your opinion.
7. Have you received any training on play-based pedagogy or approach? If yes, how long it was?

Section C: Practice of play-based approach to developing early literacy skills for early-grade children

8. How much time do you spend with your children every day for their development of reading and writing skills?
9. How do you teach the children reading and writing skills?
10. What do you use as play materials while you teach them literacy skills?
11. How do children interact with books, prints, or other materials? Describe your experience.
12. How does the child respond when they are not provided with play materials or taught through play?
13. How do the children respond while they are provided with play materials related to literacy development?

Section D: Factors influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills

14. What are the challenges to teaching children through play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills?
15. Do you think that teachers' training is necessary for developing the capacity of the teachers? If yes, why? If not, why not?
16. What do you suggest to make the existing curriculum more play-based focus to develop the literacy skills of the 4-5+ (early grade) children?

Appendix-B In-Depth-Interview Guideline (Bangla)

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

সাক্ষাতকার গ্রহণের তারিখ:

শুরুর সময় শুরুর সময়:

শুরুর সময় শেষের সময়:

সেকশন -এ: জনমিতিক তথ্য

অংশগ্রহণকারীর কোর্ড:	
অংশগ্রহণকারী শিক্ষকের নাম:	শিক্ষকের বয়স:
শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা :	বিদ্যালয়ের নাম:
চাকুরীতে প্রথম যোগদান:	চাকুরীর অভিজ্ঞতা :
গৃহীত প্রশিক্ষণ:	প্রশিক্ষণের মেয়াদ:

সেকশন-খ প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুর সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির জন্য ক্রীড়া নির্ভর শিখন-শেখানো কৌশলের উপর শিক্ষকের জ্ঞান যাচাই।

- ১। খেলাধুলা নির্ভর পঠন-পাঠন পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে আপনার মতামত কী?
- ২। প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুর সাক্ষরতা সম্পর্কে আপনি কি জানেন?
- ৩। প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুর সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতার উপকারসমূহ কী?
- ৪। প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুরা তাদের পঠন-পাঠনে যে সমস্ত খেলা খেলে থাকে , তাদের কয়েকটির নাম বলুন।
- ৫। উপযুক্ত পরিবেশসমৃদ্ধ শ্রেণিকক্ষ বেলেতে আপনি কী বুঝেন?
- ৬। শিশুর সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির জন্য উপযুক্ত শিখন পরিবেশের গুরুত্ব কী তা ব্যাখ্যা করে বলুন।
- ৭। আপনি কি খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো পদ্ধতির উপর কোন প্রশিক্ষণ নিয়েছেন? যদি নিয়ে থাকেন, তাহলে তা কত দিনের ছিল?

সেকশন-গ প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুর সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির জন্য খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক পদ্ধতির চর্চা।

- ৮। শিশুদের পড়া ও লেখা দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে আপনি শিশুদের সাথে প্রতিদিন কত সময় ব্যয় করে থাকেন?
- ৯। শিশুদের পড়া ও লেখা দক্ষতা কিভাবে শিখিয়ে থাকেন?
- ১০। শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা শেখাতে আপনি কি কি খেলার সামগ্রী ব্যবহার করেন।
- ১১। বই, ছাপনো কোন সামগ্রী বা অন্য যে কোন সামগ্রীর প্রতি শিশুরা কিভাবে প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখায়? আপনার অভিজ্ঞতা বর্ণনা করুন।

১২। খেলাধুলার সামগ্রী না পেলে শিশুরা কি ধরনের প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখায় অথবা খেলাধুলা ব্যবহার না করলে কি ধরনের প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখিয়ে থাকে?

১৩। খেলাধুলার সামগ্রী দিয়ে পাঠদান করলে কি ধরনের প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখায়?

সেকশন- ঘ শিশুর খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন কার্যক্রম বাস্তবায়নে কী কী উপাদান বাধা হিসেবে দেখেন

১৪। শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে খেলাধুলা নির্ভর শিখন-শেখানো কৌশল বাস্তবায়নে চ্যালেঞ্জসমূহ / বাধাসমূহ কী ?

১৫। খেলাধুলা নির্ভর শিখন-শেখানো কৌশল বাস্তবায়নে শিক্ষকদের দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির জন্য প্রশিক্ষণের প্রয়োজন আছে বলে আপনি মনে করেন? হ্যাঁ হলে, কেন? না হলে, কেন নয়?

১৬। ৪+ ও ৫+ বয়সি শিশুদের খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক সাক্ষরতা বৃদ্ধির জন্য প্রচলিত বিস্তৃত শিক্ষাক্রমকে আরো বেশি খেলাধুলা নির্ভর করার জন্য আপনার পরামর্শ কী?

Appendix-C Focus Group Discussion Guideline

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

FGD Date:

Start Time:

End Time:

Participant code:

Teacher's Name:

Teacher's Age:

Educational Qualification:

Name of the School:

1st Joining in the Service:

Service Experience:

Training received:

Duration of the training:

1. What do you understand about the literacy skills of pre-primary level students?
2. What is your concept about play based learning approach? Would you explain, please?
3. Do you think play-based pedagogy is useful to improve the literacy skills of pre-primary children? Why?
4. How do you define a supportive classroom literacy environment?
5. How do you support the students to develop literacy skills in the class?
6. What types of plays and games do you use in the classroom for developing your literacy skills?
7. What difference do you notice in the reaction of the children when you use a play-based approach?
8. Do you feel difficulty in using play or games related to the literacy development of the children?
9. Do you think that the classroom is well equipped with play materials? If not, what kinds of materials do you suggest?
10. What are the challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy to develop literacy skills in pre-primary children?

Appendix-D Focus Group Discussion Guideline (Bangla)

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

এফজিডি পরিচালনার তারিখ:

শুরুর সময় শুরুর সময়:

শুরুর সময় শেষের সময়:

সেকশন -এ: জনমিতিক তথ্য

অংশগ্রহণকারীর কোর্ড:	
অংশগ্রহণকারী শিক্ষকের নাম:	শিক্ষকের বয়স:
শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা :	বিদ্যালয়ের নাম:
চাকুরীতে প্রথম যোগদান:	চাকুরীর অভিজ্ঞতা :
গৃহীত প্রশিক্ষণ:	প্রশিক্ষণের মেয়াদ:

- ১। প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুর সাক্ষরতা সম্পর্কে আপনি কি জানেন?
- ২। খেলাধুলা নির্ভর পঠন-পাঠন পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে আপনার ধারণা কী? ব্যাখ্যা করে বলবেন কি?
- ৩। প্রাক-প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে খেলাধুলা নির্ভর পঠন-পাঠন পদ্ধতি কী উপকারী? হলে, কেন?
- ৪। উপযুক্ত পরিবেশসমৃদ্ধ শ্রেণিকক্ষ বলতে আপনি কী বুঝেন?
- ৫। শ্রেণিকক্ষে শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে আপনি কী ধরনের সহায়তা প্রদান করে থাকেন?
- ৬। শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা শেখাতে শ্রেণিকক্ষে আপনি কি কি ধরনের খেলার সামগ্রী ব্যবহার করেন।
- ৭। খেলাধুলার সামগ্রী দিয়ে পাঠদান করলে শিশুদের প্রতিক্রিয়ার মধ্যে কি ধরনের পার্থক্য দেখেন?
- ৮। খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের সময় আপনি কী ধরনের প্রতিবন্ধকতা মোকাবেলা করে থাকেন কী?
- ৯। আপনার বিদ্যালয়ের শ্রেণিকক্ষ কি খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের জন্য সুসজ্জিত? যদি না হয়, তাহলে আপনি কি ধরনের খেলাধুলার সামগ্রী প্রদানের জন্য পরামর্শ দিবেন।
- ১০। শিশুদের সাক্ষরতা দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে খেলাধুলা নির্ভর শিখন-শেখানো কৌশল বাস্তবায়নে বাধাসমূহ কী?

Appendix-E Classroom Observation Checklist

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

Date of Observation:

Time:

Name of the School:

Name of the Teacher:

Gender: Male / Female

Age:

Class: Pre-primary

Number of Children:

Boys:

Girls:

Sl. No.	Observation list
	A. Teacher's perceptions on play-based pedagogy
1.	Was the teacher aware/conscious of the play-based teaching?
2.	Did the class teacher use plays for teaching literacy skills?
3.	Did the teacher encourage the students to play for developing literacy skills?
	B. Supportive classroom
4.	How did the teacher motivate the learners?
5.	How did the teacher engage the learners in play for learning literacy?
6.	Was the classroom well-designed and decorated?
7.	Were there enough play materials available in the classroom?
8.	Did the students play with the play materials for learning literacy skills?
	C. Learners' development of pre-reading and writing skills
9.	Could the learners identify Bengali letters through any play?
10.	Could the learners identify the sounds of the letter through any play?
11.	How far do the learners understand the instructions of the play by listening?
12.	How far did the learners read the signs and symbols through play?
13.	Did the learners interpret pictures and images in the classroom while playing?
14.	Did the learners able to write any alphabet or number through play?
15.	How far did the students enjoy playing while learning literacy skills?
16.	How far did the learners draw or color the pictures through play?
	D. Teacher's practice and performance
17.	Could the teacher well relate the literacy skill-related lessons with play materials?
18.	How far the teacher was aware of the learning outcomes of the play-based lesson? lesson?
19.	Was the teacher was expert in using playing materials?
20.	How far was the teacher innovative in employing play-based pedagogy?

Appendix-F Classroom Observation Checklist (Bangla)

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

পর্যবেক্ষণের তারিখ:

সময়:

বিদ্যালয়ের নাম:

শিক্ষকের নাম:

লিঙ্গ :

বয়স:

শ্রেণি: প্রাক-প্রাথমিক

শিক্ষার্থী সংখ্যা:

উপস্থিত ছাত্র :

ছাত্রী :

নম্বর	পর্যবেক্ষণের বিষয়
	ক. খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে শিক্ষকের ধারণা
১.	শিক্ষক খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে সচেতন ছিলেন?
২.	শিক্ষার্থীর শিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে শিক্ষক কি কোন খেলা ব্যবহার করেছেন?
৩.	শিক্ষার্থীর শিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে শিক্ষক শিক্ষার্থীকে কি কোন উৎসাহ প্রদান করেছেন?
	খ. শিক্ষার্থীবান্ধব শ্রেণিকক্ষ
৪.	শিক্ষার্থীর শিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে শিক্ষক শিক্ষার্থীকে কিভাবে উৎসাহ প্রদান করেছেন?
৫.	শিক্ষার্থীর শিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে শিক্ষক শিক্ষার্থীকে কিভাবে খেলায় নিয়োজিত করেছেন?
৬.	শ্রেণিকক্ষ কি যথেষ্ট সাজানো গোছানো ছিল?
৭.	শ্রেণিকক্ষে কি যথেষ্ট পরিমাণ খেলার সামগ্রী ছিল?
৮.	শিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়নে শিক্ষার্থীরা কি খেলার সামগ্রী দিয়ে খেলায় অংশগ্রহণ করেছেন?
	গ. শিক্ষার্থীর প্রাক পঠন ও লিখন দক্ষতা উন্নয়ন যাচাই
৯.	খেলার মাধ্যমে শিক্ষার্থী কি কোন বাংলা বর্ণ সনাক্ত করতে পেরেছে?
১০.	খেলার মাধ্যমে শিক্ষার্থী কি কোন বর্ণের উচ্চারণ সনাক্ত করতে পেরেছে?
১১.	শিক্ষার্থীরা শিক্ষক কর্তৃক খেলার নির্দেশনা কতটুকু বুঝতে পেরেছে?
১২.	খেলার ভিতর দিয়ে শিক্ষার্থীরা বিভিন্ন প্রতীক ও চিহ্ন কতটুকু বুঝতে পেরেছে?
১৩.	খেলার ভিতর দিয়ে শিক্ষার্থীরা কি শ্রেণিকক্ষের বিভিন্ন ছবি ও চিত্র ব্যাখ্যা করতে পেরেছে?
১৪.	খেলার মাধ্যমে শিক্ষার্থীরা কি কোন বর্ণ বা সংখ্যা লিখতে পেরেছে?
১৫.	শিক্ষার্থীরা খেলাধুলার মাধ্যমে শিখনকালে কতটুকু আনন্দ লাভ করেছেন?
১৬.	শিক্ষার্থীরা খেলাধুলার মাধ্যমে কি ছবি আঁকতে বা রং করতে পেরেছে?
	ঘ. খেলাধুলার মাধ্যমে পাঠদানে শিক্ষকের চর্চা ও দক্ষতা
১৭.	শিক্ষক কি শিখন দক্ষতা অর্জনের জন্য যথাযথ খেলার সামগ্রী সম্পর্কিত করতে পেরেছেন?
১৮.	শিক্ষক কি খেলাধুলানির্ভর পাঠের শিখনফল সম্পর্কে সচেতন ছিলেন?
১৯.	শিক্ষক কি খেলাধুলার সামগ্রীর ব্যবহার সম্পর্কে দক্ষ ছিলেন?
২০.	শিক্ষক খেলাধুলানির্ভর পঠন-পাঠন পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগে কতটুকু সৃজনশীল ছিলেন?

Appendix-G

Consent Form

Title of the Research: Teachers' Perceptions about Play-based Pedagogy to Develop the Literacy Skills of Children in Pre-primary Level

Researcher: Mohd. Golam Mostafa

Purpose of the research:

Institute of Educational Development (IED), BRAC University has taken a research initiative as part of a Master's course in early childhood development. The research will focus on your perception of the pre-primary teachers about play-based pedagogy to develop the literacy skills of the early-grade children of the government primary schools. The current study aims to explore the perceptions of pre-primary teachers in promoting early literacy skills. This study will be conducted by the researcher, an M.Sc. student, as a part of his MS thesis.

Expectations from you:

If you agree to participate, I will ask you some questions for information on some of the research questions. It will take about 45 minutes to one hour to complete the discussion/interview that will follow according to the process/questionnaire. You will answer as you know and feel about the topic of discussion freely.

Risks:

The study contains minimal risk. There will be no harm or discomfort for you to answer the questions. It would not cause any difficulty or problems in your professional career. However, there might be some points you may consider. If you feel embarrassed to discuss problems, you need not answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time.

Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality:

All information collected from you will remain strictly confidential. The researcher will be responsible to ensure the protection of the information. Moreover, if you want to know anything further about the research, or any relevant information, please contact me and I would be happy to answer any of your queries about the study.

Consent for audio recording:

Audio recording is part of this research study. To let you know, I would like to audio record our discussions over a digital recorder or mobile phone to decode and transcribe the discussion.

If you agree to my proposal of participating in my study, please put your signature in the specified space below.

Mohd. Golam Mostafa

Signature of the researcher

Researcher and student, MSc in ECD

Institute of Educational Development (IED) BRACU

I have read the consent form. I completely understand my right about participation and I am willing to participate in this research.

Name (Please print): _____ Signature: _____

Address and contact no: _____ Date: _____