

**Exploring the Quality of Picture Storybooks
Used in the Preschools of Plan Bangladesh**

A thesis presented to the
Thesis Committee, BRAC University Institute of Education Development

Rabeya Hossain
rabeya.h@bracu.ac.bd

Supervisors:
Dr. Chowdhury SB Jalal
Dr. Faith Lamb Parker

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
MASTERS OF SCIENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



April 21, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Literacy skills acquired in early years of life build a firm foundation on which the more complex literacy skills of adulthood depend (Snow, 2006). Preschool years are vital to learn reading therefore, reading to children has been considered as one of the central points of literacy development and classroom practices for over a century (Hoffman, 1992; McKeown & Beck, 2006). Children who fail to read early in their school careers are at serious risk of grade retention and special education placement.

Use of picture storybooks in pre-school has long been recognized to promote children's language and pre-literacy skills and eventually achieve school readiness. (Whitehurst et. al., 1988; Whitehurst & Arnold, 1994; Aboud, 2006). In spite of introducing a large number of storybooks and providing teachers' professional training on shared reading session in the non-government preschools, the poor quality of reading materials remains one of the major hurdles towards successful preschool programs in Bangladesh. This lack in the quality of books prevents children from getting the optimum benefits of language development (Aboud, 2009). In addition, the absence of research evidences on the quality of the reading materials is acting as barriers to children's exposure to quality literature. It is, therefore, important to ensure the quality of picture storybooks used in the preschools.

The aim of this quantitative study was to assess the quality of Bengali picture storybooks used in preschools run by Plan Bangladesh. Qualitative judgment, however, was used to quantify the book's quality. Among all storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh, a total of 38 books which are known to have met the selection criteria were included for the study.

Though the study findings indicated that, on average, picture storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh are of good quality in terms of all aspects, still few criteria need further attention in the aspect of illustration, content and format. The findings of this study provided evidences with regard to the quality of existing picture storybooks and will help select and develop picture storybooks for the nationwide preprimary education.

Though the importance of early years is still an emerging concept in Bangladesh, its significance has been recognized by both government and non-government organizations and brought them under one umbrella to implement the nationwide preschool program. To accelerate positive outcomes of this effort, use of quality resources in preschool program is one of many essentials. This study showed a new mean for evaluating children literature through which forthcoming preschool program can be enriched further for the benefits of young children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
Different aspects of picture storybook.....	2
<i>The illustrations of picture storybooks</i>	2
<i>The content of picture storybooks</i>	3
<i>The language of picture storybooks</i>	4
<i>The format of picture storybooks</i>	5
Rationale	5
Operational Definitions.....	6
Research question/Objectives	6
METHODOLOGY	7
Sample	7
Measures	7
Tool development procedure	7
Data collection procedure	8
Book analysis Strategy.....	9
RESULTS	10
DISCUSSION	17
Summary and recommendation	22
Acknowledgement	24
REFERENCES	26
ANNEX	28

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Categories of picture storybooks by Publishers.....	10
Table 2: Comparison of grade means between expert and researcher.....	11
Figure 1:Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the ‘illustration’ (relationship to text) aspect.....	11
Figure 2:Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the ‘illustration’ (medium and style) aspect	12
Figure 3: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the aspect of ‘content’	12
Figure 4: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the language aspect .	13
Figure 5: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the format aspect.....	13
Figure 6: Score in the aspect of illustrations (Relationship to text) of books in all categories	14
Figure 7:Score in the aspect of illustrations (Medium and style) of books in all categories	14
Figure 8: Score in the aspect of content of books in all categories.....	15
Figure 9: Score in language aspect of books in all categories	15
Figure 10: Score in format aspect of books in all categories.....	16

INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills acquired in early years of life build a firm foundation on which the more complex literacy skills of adulthood depend (Snow, 2006). Reading to children has been considered as one of the central points of literacy development and classroom practices for over a century (McKeown & Beck, 2006). Preschool years are vital to learn reading (Hoffman, 1992). Children who fail to read early in their school careers are at serious risk of grade retention and special education placement. Children, therefore, must learn to read in the early school years (Fletcher & Reese, 2004).

Use of picture storybooks in pre-school has long been recognized to promote children's language and pre-literacy skills in early years, and achieve school readiness. (Whitehurst et. al., 1988; Whitehurst & Arnold, 1994; Aboud, 2006). Children's inability to develop appropriate language competencies, specifically academic language competencies jeopardize their ability to acquire new concepts and to engage in abstract thinking and exposure to storybook reading in the preschool years fosters the development of academic language competence (Vygotsky, 1986 cited in Ntuli, D., & Pretorius, E. 2005).

In spite of introducing a large number of storybooks and providing teachers' professional training on shared reading session in the non-government preschools, the quality of reading materials remain one of the major hurdles towards successful preschool programs in Bangladesh.

This lack in the quality of books prevents children from getting the optimum benefits of language development (Aboud, 2009). Furthermore, the absence of research evidences on the quality of the reading materials is acting as barriers to children's exposure to quality literature and preventing them from blooming to their full potential. It is, therefore, important to ensure the quality of picture storybooks used in the preschools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's literature today includes traditional literature, fiction and non-fiction, biography, poetry and verse, and picture books (Huck, 1979). Among all the literacy experiences that occur in preschool years, picture storybook reading is the most influential for children in learning language and gaining knowledge about the world around them (Schickedanz, 1999). In their early years, children come across an abundance of literature (Huck, 1979). They learn to interact with print materials, and consequently experience the pleasure of reading (Dwyer & Neuman, 2008).

Child development research demonstrated the wide variations in individual rate of growth. Even within individual, growth may be uneven; a spurt in one aspect of development may lead a spurt in another but recent research emphasizes more on the concept that development evolves when interaction between biological, cultural and life experiences takes place and reshapes existing structures of the neural cells. This concept suggests a need for quality literature that captured the uniqueness of childhood (Huck, 1979).

Different aspects of picture storybook

As exposure to quality literature matters for young children, certain aspects of the book should be taken into consideration such as the illustrations, content, language, and format (Huck, 1979; Cohen et al., 1998 & Nikolajeva, 2003).

The illustrations of picture storybooks

Illustrations are no longer extra accompaniments to the text in children's books. They are rather signified for their role in today's world of media and technology in developing children's sophisticated skill for reading pictures and symbols at an early age (Whitehead, 2002). During picture-storybook reading sessions, pictures can be used to scaffold children's learning of new words as they focus entirely on the story and do not need to obtain new vocabulary from the surroundings (Fletcher & Reese, 2004).

In addition, research has amply demonstrated that illustrations work as vital and effective means by which the readers may learn the facts, attitudes and values, not only about self but also others. The major purpose of an illustration is to reflect, interpret and extend the text of the book. Therefore, whatever medium the illustrator chooses i.e. woodcuts, collage, paints, pen and ink, crayon and chalk, or photography, must be appropriate for the mood of the story. Moreover, as children prefer bright colored pictures, appropriate use of theme based color of the book is significant. Quality illustrations not only encourage the readers to look at the pictures but also contribute to their minds and imaginations which the readers would not get from the text alone (Cianciolo, 1970 & Huck, 1979).

The style of illustration, which is the arrangement of line, color, and mass into a visual image, helps children to broaden and deepen their receptive powers and plays important role in the development of young children. Children develop gradually for more complex and varied art style with increase in experience and visual maturity. Considering the age of the child is, therefore, important while choosing the style for illustrations. (Huck, 1979).

The fusion of text and pictures must be united in a way that it would be hard to imagine one without the other (Huck, 1979). This relationship helps young readers in developing their early literacy as they make arbitrary connections between words and objects or concepts (Nikolajeva, 2003). Also, children's exposure to story text ideas helps them to think and organize their thoughts and eventually produces language (McKeown & Beck, 2006).

The content of picture storybooks

Young children are filled with varied interests. Their insatiable curiosity about their world makes them ready to appreciate picture storybooks of different types and with different themes such as, animal stories, fantasy, fables, folk tales, everyday familiar experiences and so on (Huck, 1979).

Children's attention span progressively develops with age and interest (Huck, 1979). Age appropriate picture storybooks with conceptually challenging content develop preschoolers' language and comprehension abilities and engage them in construction of meaning (Beck and McKeown, 2001; cited in Dwyer & Neuman, 2008). Preschoolers tend to have short attention span thus; picture storybooks with short stories hold their attention and interest (Huck, 1979). Reading such books develops children's ability of focused attention, an essential competency for academic achievements (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). So, having interesting content is important for literacy growth (Hoffman, 1992; Dwyer & Neuman, 2008).

Picture storybooks frequently provide young children their first impression of gender and racial stereotypes. It is, therefore, important to portray characters of male and female, all races, all colors in a wide range of occupations (Huck, 1979). Similarly, inclusion of various socio-economic backgrounds and settings help children develop positive self image (Cohen, 1998).

The language of picture storybooks

Picture storybooks with interesting language, promotes children's vocabulary by introducing new words (Cohen, 1998). These words may help children to develop an early sensitivity to the imaginative use of language. Picture storybooks with repeated words and figurative language are appreciated by children (Huck, 1979). Children learn new vocabulary as picture storybooks contain many words which are more sophisticated than words used in adult-child conversation (Senechal et al., 1996). Evidences show that, reading picture storybooks is related to children's language growth during preschool years which leads towards later school achievements (Whitehurst et al., 1988 & Senechal et al., 1996). A developmentally sensitive book-reading session can maximize children's potentiality for learning language. Frequent reading of picture storybooks is also a way to estimate a child's potential for language learning (Fletcher & Reese, 2004).

The format of picture storybooks

Format of the book plays important role in creating a total impact on its young readers. To confirm the appeal of the jacket and cover design, illustrations should be unique to express the general character or mood of the story. The endpapers need to be harmonized with the cover or other pictures in the book. These are the first and last pages of the book, stronger than the other printed pages; one of which is glued to the reverse of the cover, while the other is not pasted down. The importance of endpapers is making the book attractive to the young children as well as helping them to think about the story they are going to read through its illustrations or colors. Besides, the large type face and proper spacing between pictures and text can hold the attention of the young readers. At the same time, appropriate space between the lines make the text clear to its readers. Durability of the bindings also needs attention while considering the quality of picture storybook (Huck, 1979).

Rationale

The concept of preschool is emerging in Bangladesh. Currently, there are no government preschools except some unstructured “Baby Classes”. The non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as few private kindergarten schools, however, run more than 150 structured preschools. Due to the heterogeneous set up, the quality of curriculum and reading materials of these preschools vary widely (Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education, 2008). The lack of quality reading experience is particularly problematic in developing countries due to the scarcity of quality books for children and illiterate parents (Aboud, 2009). This, eventually negatively influences cognitive and linguistic achievements at the early years of life. Children of poorer households are, therefore, at higher risk of both academic and reading failure (Raikes et al., 2006; Dearing et al., 2006) leading to grade retention and dropout (Aboud, 2009).

Studies show that along with the number of storybooks, amount of daily reading time, teachers’ behavior, and quality of storybooks also matters significantly in children’s language development. Furthermore, a little systematic effort to improve reading materials could significantly benefit the children (Aboud, 2009).

The proposed study will assess the quality of the picture storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh. The results of this study will be important in the development of picture storybooks by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) which will be used in the upcoming nationwide preschool program, to be implemented by the Government of Bangladesh (Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education, 2008).

Operational Definitions

Picture storybook: In picture story books text and pictures together tell a story (Hoffman, 1992). The same characters and the settings are drawn repeatedly but the action of the characters varies (Huck, 1979).

Preschool: Preschool or preprimary education has been defined as the developmental and educational support to the child in the age range of 3 to <6 in order to ensure the child's right to protection, care, survival and preparation for school education through play, amusement and introduction to literacy and numeracy, irrespective of the child's physical, mental and social status (Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education, 2008).

Research question/Objectives

What was the quality of the Bengali picture storybooks used in the Plan preschools in meeting the developmental needs of young children? To address this question, two objectives for this study were developed. They are:

- To assess the quality of the Bengali picture storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh.
- To develop a tool to measure the quality of Bengali picture storybooks.

METHODOLOGY

This was a quantitative study to assess the quality of Bengali picture storybooks used in preschools run by Plan Bangladesh. Qualitative judgment, however, was used to quantify the quality of books.

Sample

All storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh which fall under the definition of 'picture storybook' were included in the study. These books were elected by Plan Bangladesh and are currently used in all preschool run by Plan Bangladesh. A total of 38 such books which known to have met the selection criteria were included for the study (Titles of these 38 picture storybooks are attached in the annex).

Measures

The goal was to assess the quality of existing picture storybooks used in the PLAN preschools. A five-point Likert scale was developed based on Charlotte Huck's (1979) guideline for evaluating picture story books and validated by the experts. Then it was administered to rate the 38 picture storybooks.

Tool development procedure

To develop the instrument for assessing the quality of the books, a set of aspects of quality picture storybooks, i.e. illustrations, content, language, and format were selected using Charlotte Huck's guideline (Huck, 1979). Under each aspect several criteria, i.e. items, were developed using an adaptation of Huck's criteria. These criteria covered the attributes of "quality" picture storybooks.

Illustrations included text/ image relationship, appeal of the illustrations, contribution of illustrations on children's interest, contribution of illustrations in children's imagination, and impact of illustrations on children's mind. Appropriate plot, character and theme of the story, cultural appropriateness, addressing stereotypes (e.g. gender), socioeconomic background, and religion were the criteria for the content aspect. The aspect language included repetitive words, figurative language, and comprehensiveness of the language, appropriateness of the language and use of

humor. Later on, the first two criteria were dropped as these were graded inconsistently by the experts. The last aspect, format included size of the book, cover design, end papers, title page, spacing of picture and text and durability of the binding.

Each criterion was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement by the researcher to the standard as mentioned in the guideline. To ensure validity of the instrument, it was given to five experts to read and provide feedback on the content, clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensiveness of the items. Two randomly selected books were given to get an idea of the picture storybooks for which the instrument was developed. Feedback or suggestions were incorporated to improve the content validity of the instrument (A sample instrument used for validation is attached in the annex).

To ensure reliability, the revised instrument was given to a different set of five experts again along with five randomly selected books to grade each book using the instrument. Two books used for ensuring validity were not included in this random selection. Due to the time and resource constraints, also because of the limited time available from the experts, only 5 books were used for this purpose.

After receiving the graded checklist from the experts, two items with repeated inconsistent grading were excluded from the list. Then the average of the total score for each item was compared with the score given by the researcher on the same set of books. A Paired sample t-test was done to compare the mean differences between the experts and the researcher opinions on the aspects of illustrations, content, language and format in terms of evaluating picture storybooks. The purpose of this inter-rater reliability (i.e. between researchers and experts) was to ensure the appropriateness of the scale for measuring particular variable.

Data collection procedure

Data collection began after the instrument was developed and tested for its validity and reliability. All 38 picture storybooks were collected from a Plan preschool,

representative of picture storybooks used in all of the 752 Plan Bangladesh preschools throughout the country.

Book analysis Strategy

Each of the 38 books was read independently by the researcher. Using the 5-point Likert scale, items related to illustrations, content, language and format were rated on the researcher's level of agreement with each item. Scores of each item were added to make a scale for each aspect. The combined score of all aspects was used to assess the books quality. SPSS-Win version-16 was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

The picture storybooks used in PLAN preschools were published by different organizations including ECDRC, IEDBU, Inner Force, Panjeri publications and Kid-Zone publications. The books were categorized according to types and themes before doing the comparison (The definitions of the types and themes of the picture storybooks are attached in the annex).

Among all the picture storybooks used in PLAN preschools, IED-BU has the maximum both in number (15 out of 38) and variety. Panjeri Publication has the minimum number of books (5 out of 38). According to the category of picture storybooks, the category “Familiar Everyday Experience” has maximum number of books, followed by “Animal story”. Both “Fantasy” and “Folk tale” categories have minimum number of books (Table1).

Table 1: Categories of picture storybooks by Publishers

Category of picture storybook	IED-BU	Inner force	Panjeri Publications	Kid-Zone Publications	Total
Animal Story	8	-	2	-	10
Fantasy	3	-	-	-	3
Fables	-	-	-	7	7
Folk Tale	-	-	3	-	3
Family Story	2	2	-	-	4
Familiar Everyday Experience	2	8	-	1	11

In terms of the aspect ‘illustrations’, average mean values of experts & researcher were 53.2 & 54.5 respectively. No significant difference was observed between the experts & researcher’s opinion about illustrations in terms of picture storybooks evaluation (Table 2). Mean values of experts & researcher in the aspect ‘content’ were 32.4 & 34.6 respectively. Scored compared using t-test, did not reveal any significant difference between the experts and researcher’s rating in any of the aspects.

Table 2: Comparison of grade means between expert and researcher

Mean $\pm$ STDEV			
Aspects	Expert	Researcher	t-test (p value)
Illustrations	53.2 $\pm$ 3.49	54.5 $\pm$ 3.6	.572 (ns)
Content	32.4 $\pm$ 3.4	34.6 $\pm$ 3.8	.949 (ns)
Language	15.2 $\pm$.4	15.2 $\pm$.4	1.00 (ns)
Format	33.6 $\pm$ 4.7	33.8 $\pm$ 5.8	.079 (ns)

All books were found to be well representing the items ‘illustration’ (>23) with regard to relationship to text except “Stimulate creative thinking” (22.4). The unity of illustrations and text was well portrayed in terms of accuracy and consistency as well as helping to understand the meaning of the text. All books are able to evoke reader’s interest using illustrations and text together and are avoided creating negative impression on children’s mind. The books also scored relatively lower in holding reader’s interest, promoting scope for reader’s imagination, provide clues to the action and in focusing main character in illustrations. The item “Stimulate creative thinking” was not so well represented in any of the books (Fig 1).

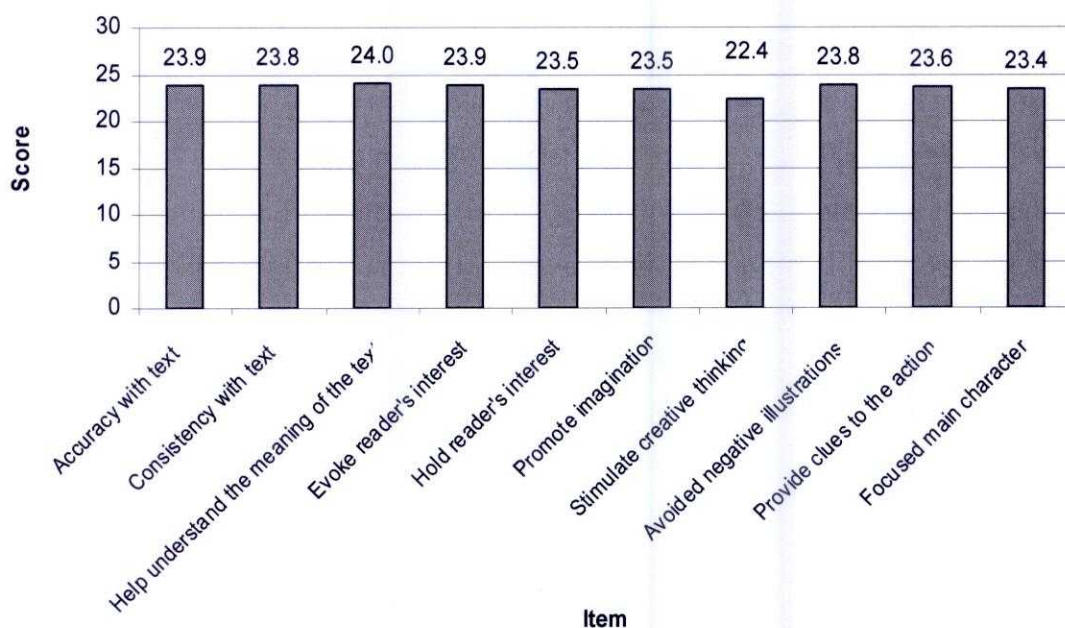


Figure 1: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the ‘illustration’ (relationship to text) aspect

In the aspect of ‘illustration’ (medium and style), the books were found to be representing better in terms of item “Appropriate use of medium” (23.1) compared to other such items, e.g. “Appropriate style” (Fig 2).

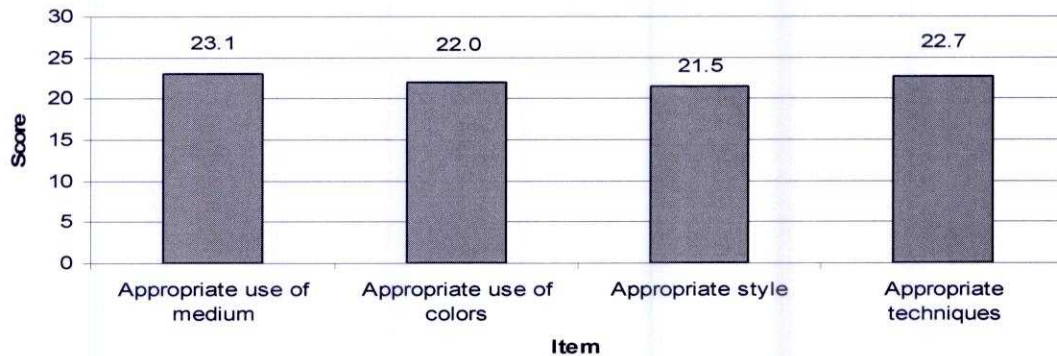


Figure 2: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the ‘illustration’ (medium and style) aspect

All picture storybooks were found appealing to children with appropriate theme and well constructed plot in case of the aspect ‘content’. The books were well defined and showed consistent characters very well. Also, the cultural background and positive self reflection of the characters were better portrayed. The books were found culturally appropriate. The books showed an average representation of the item “Gender equity” (20.4 out of 30), while did not reflect socioeconomic and religious background very well (10.3 and 0 respectively out of 30) (Fig 3).

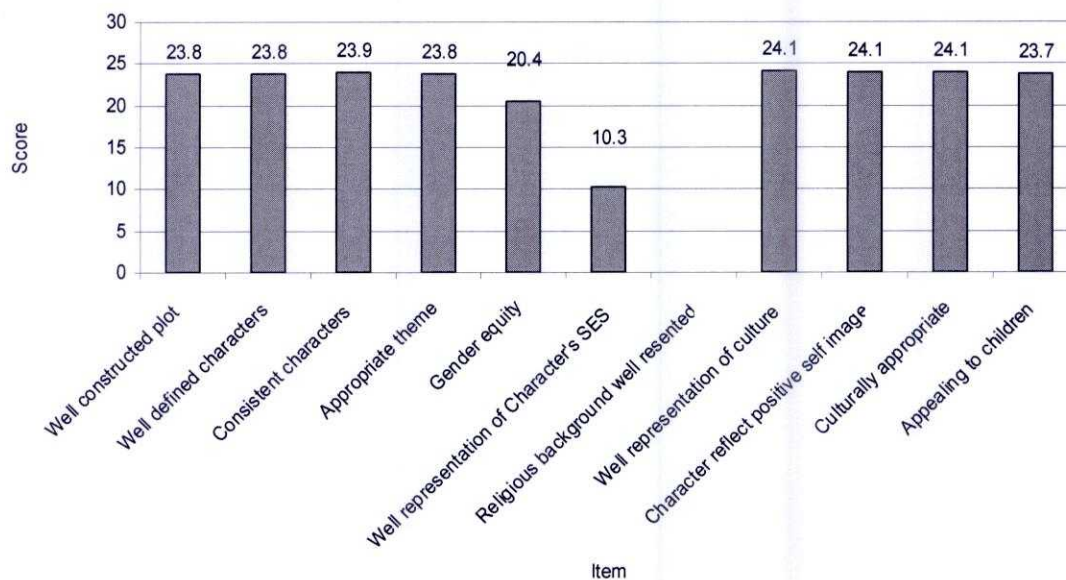


Figure 3: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the aspect of ‘content’

In the aspect of ‘language’, all books were found to be well representing items “Comprehensible words”, “Simple sentences” and “Lively and credible dialogue”(>23.5), with the item indicating “Short sentences” being the lowest (Fig 4).

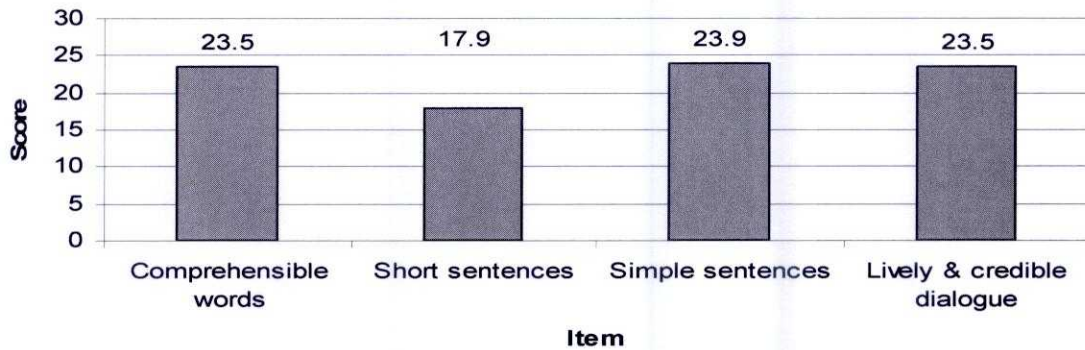


Figure 4: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the language aspect

All books were found to be well representing items “Book size”, “Well chosen font type” and “Paper quality” in the aspect of ‘format’. Comparatively, items representing “spirit of book cover”, “Binding”, “Book cover design”, “Well designed title page”, “Well chosen font type”, “Story through title page” and “Varied spacing of picture and text” scored lower, with the items regarding endpapers, “Attractiveness of endpapers” and “Endpapers harmonize with other pictures” being the lowest (Fig 5).

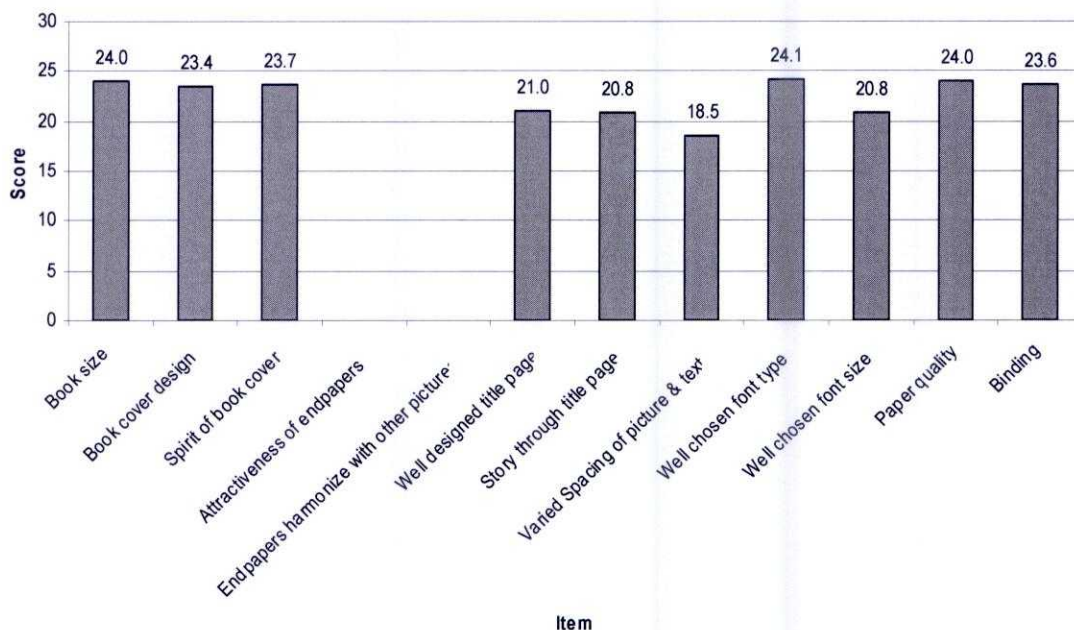


Figure 5: Item-wise average scores of all picture storybooks in the format aspect

The 'illustration' aspect (relationship to text) was well represented by the books in all categories on average, with 'Folk tale' and 'Familiar everyday experience' having the maximum and minimum scores respectively (41.7 and 36.8 out of 50) (Fig 6).

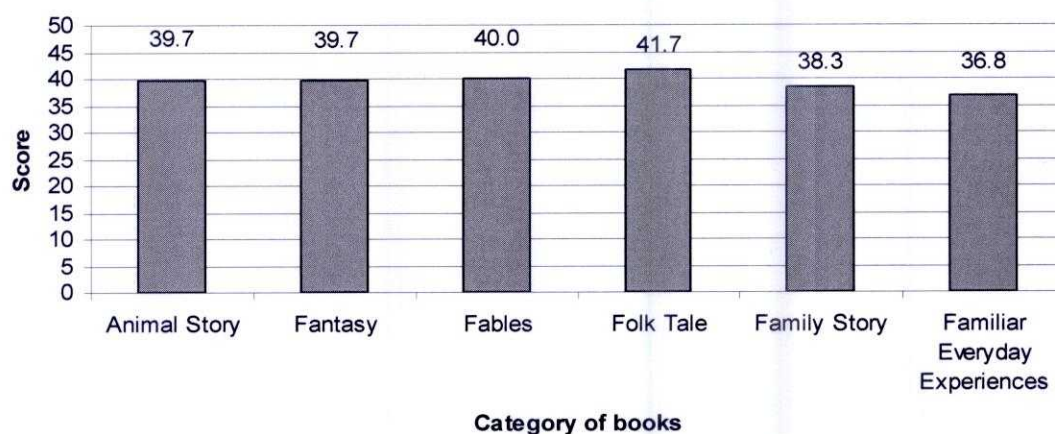


Figure 6: Score in the aspect of illustrations (Relationship to text) of books in all categories

Books in the 'Fables' and 'Folk Tale' categories well represented the aspect 'illustration' (Medium and style). The category of 'Everyday Familiar Experience' did not reflect satisfactory representation of this aspect (13.2 out of 20). In addition, books in 'Animal Story', 'Fantasy' and 'Family Story' categories performed quiet similar (15, 14.7 and 14.5 respectively) (Fig 7).

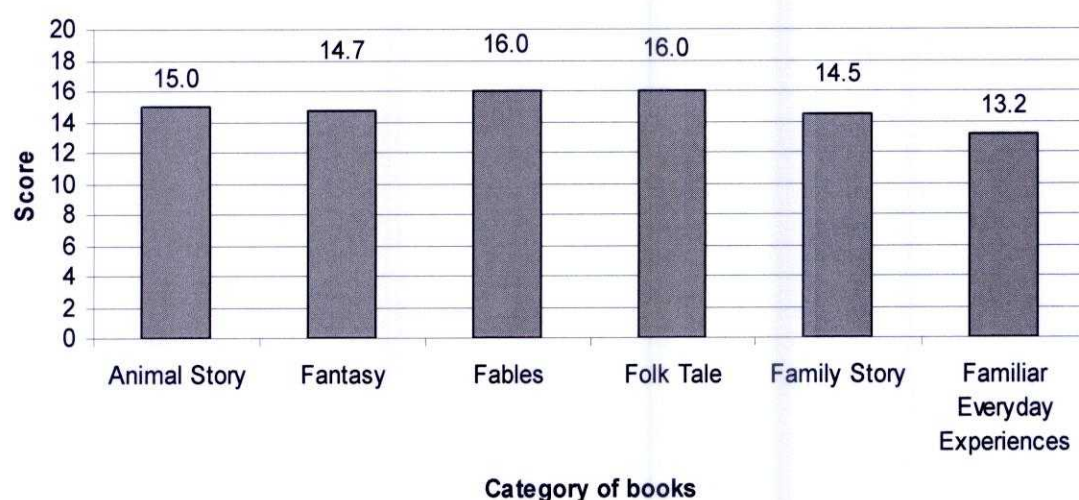


Figure 7: Score in the aspect of illustrations (Medium and style) of books in all categories

Books in “Folk tale” category were well representing the aspect of ‘content’. Comparatively, books in “Family Story”, “Fantasy”, “Familiar Everyday Experience” and “Fable” categories performed lower, with “Animal story” being the lowest (27 out of 55) (Fig 8).

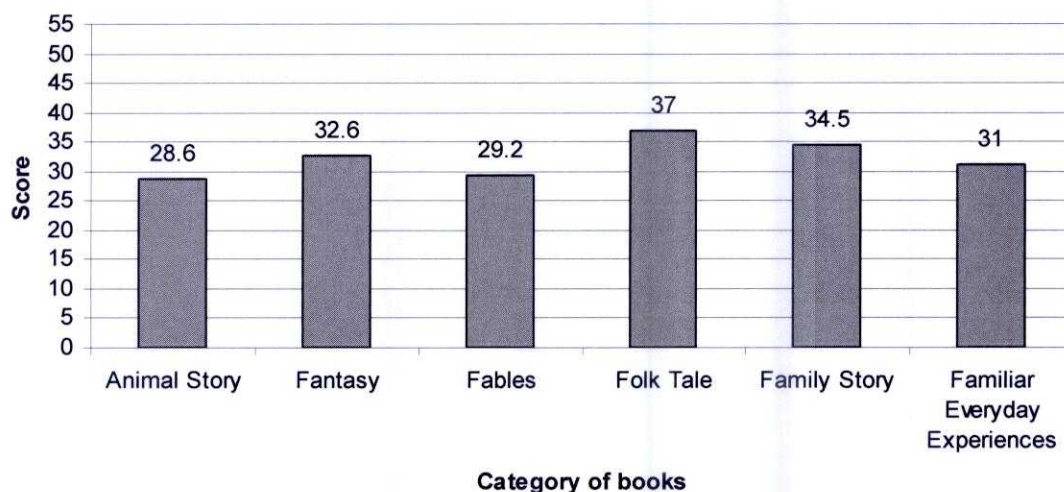


Figure 8: Score in the aspect of content of books in all categories

Books in all categories represented good use of language, except in the category of “Fable” (14.1 out of 20). (Fig 9)

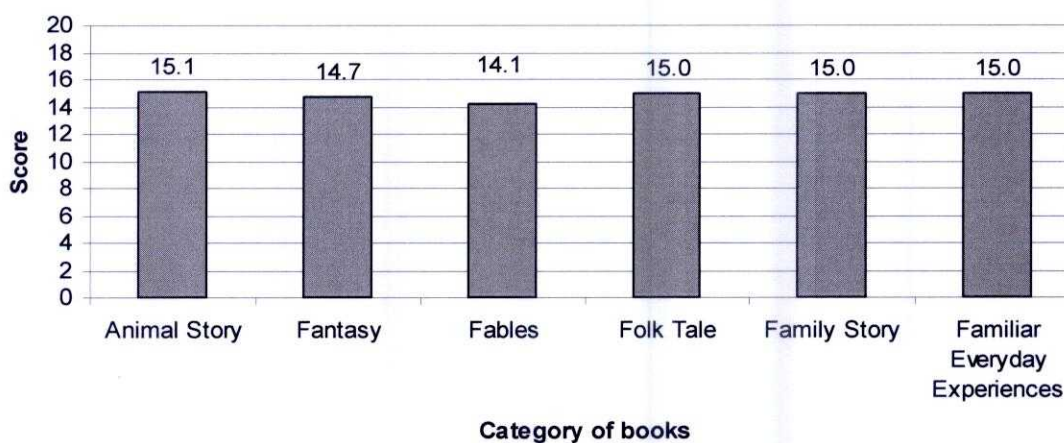


Figure 9: Score in language aspect of books in all categories

The following figure shows that, on average books in all categories represented good format. Books in the “Animal story” (40 out of 60) category have better format among all. Books in the “Fables” category did not represent good format as others (34.7 out of 60) (Fig 10).

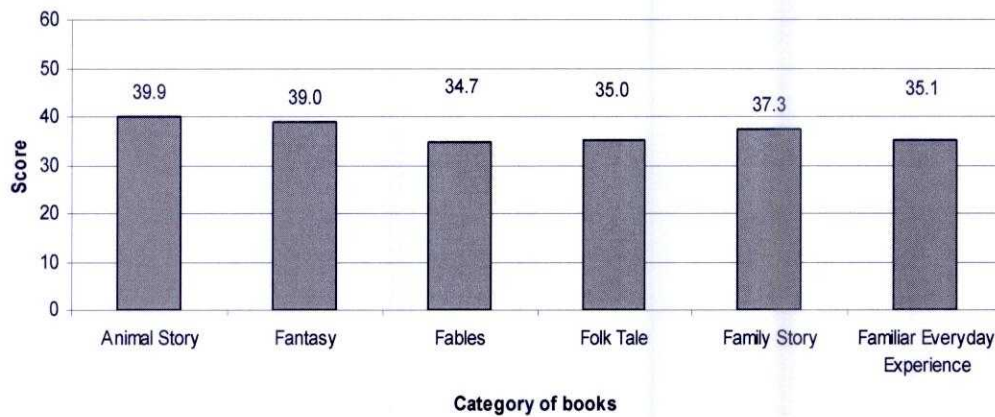


Figure 10: Score in format aspect of books in all categories

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the quality of picture storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh. Despite the qualitative judgmental nature of the study the data generated was purely quantitative. Therefore, the analysis and expression of the judgments were in terms of quantitative outcomes.

Illustration of the picture storybooks (Relationship to text & medium and style)

In the aspect of Illustration for relationship to the text the average score for all picture storybooks was about 23 out of 30 (Fig 1). For medium and style all types of books scored between 22 and 23 out of 30 in all items (Fig 2). In addition, among all categories, picture storybooks in 'Folk Tale' scored highest. All the books in these two categories contained illustrations drawn by foreign illustrators. These illustrations are of good quality in all respects. One of the outstanding drawings reviewed in this research used soft yellow, mossy green, and shades of black to portray the forest which gives the readers a feeling of being in the forest, thus reflecting the mood of the story. This folk tale, '*Pinky O Tin Valuk*' (*Pinky and the Three Bears*) was rewritten by Firoz Ashraf. The choice of brown and yellow colors to portray the bears, also the style and technique used to draw the fur on the bear gives children a realistic view of this huge furry animal. The uses of different shades of black in illustrating the bear's cave provided the readers a feeling of peeping inside as well as clues to the action of the story.

Previously, it was found that, illustrations play vital role in developing children's sophisticated skill for reading pictures at an early age (Whitehead, 2002). Also, the unity between the picture and text is essential to sustain children's interest and carry the story line. Hence, picture storybooks place a greater demand on the talent of both author and artist than does any other books (Huck.1979). Moreover, children enjoy and readily accept use of various media in the illustrations of the picture storybooks which eventually contribute to their mind and imagination (Huck, 1979).

The item-wise score of medium and style confirmed that 'Appropriate style' of illustrations needs greater attention. Almost all illustrations in all books followed similar style, i.e. pictures were illustrated in watercolors and outlined with pen and ink.

While choosing the style, it is important to consider the age of child for whom the book is intended to. Further, children should be given the opportunity to view various styles of illustrations in picture storybooks so that they may have a lasting effect on their taste in art in general (Huck, 1979). While analyzing by the category of books, the illustrations in the picture books were found to be of poorer quality. The colors used were pale and muddled, the styles lacked in making children feel the environment, and were unlikely to appeal to young readers.

Content of the picture storybooks:

Almost all items in the aspect of Content of all picture storybooks scored between 23.7 and 24 out of 30(Fig 3), which reflect the good quality of the content. Two of the items reflecting quality of the contents of picture storybooks are illustrated through the following examples.

Age appropriate theme, which is one of the items in the aspect of content, was very well reflected in the story '*Boker Chana Tutul Mitul*' written by Reza Mahmood Al Huda. The success of the author lies in the well constructed plot where all the characters were very well defined. The author efficiently manipulated the affectionate mother hen, the friendly chickens and the helpful monkey to convey the idea of being helpful to others. This idea was persistent throughout the story. Children can see the reflection of warmth of mother's love in the character of mother hen. When the baby stork fell from the tree, the mother hen covered it with her wings to give protection from the sun and the monkey put the baby stork back in the nest. This lovely animal story helps children to see the reflection of their much known world around them which is full of loving and caring people.

Only few books addressed the gender issue as measured by the content item 'Both male and female characters are presented with equal importance'. One story book

'*Ghuri Orano*' (*Flying Kites*) written by Syeda Sazia Zaman addressed this issue with compassion. The friendship among boys and girls and the cherished joyful moments the children treasure from their freedom of playing together were portrayed by the author with great skill.

Previous study has revealed that, content is crucial to young children's literacy growth (Hoffman, 1992; Dwyer & Neuman, 2008). In addition, when picture storybooks portray characters of both sexes in a wide range of occupations and from a great variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds then children get exposure to a more honest portrayal of world literature (Huck, 1979).

Limitation identified through the evaluation instrument is the lack of stories addressing the items 'Well representation of character's socioeconomic background' and 'Religious background well represented'. Both items scored considerably low, 10.3 and 0 respectively. Animal story, a very popular theme in children literature, rarely reflects characters' socioeconomic and religious background but picture storybooks in other categories such as, 'Familiar Everyday Experiences' or 'Family Stories' can have positive representation of characters from different socio-economic background, such as, the friendship between a girl-servant and the little girl of the landlord. This positive relationship which can help to break down negative cultural stereotypes is rarely found in our children's literature.

Language of the picture storybooks:

Almost all items in the aspect of Language of all picture storybooks scored relatively same (>23.5 out of 30) (Fig.4). In addition, picture storybooks in all categories also confirmed the use of good quality language with an average score of 14.8 out of 20 (Fig 9), thus the study results showed that Plan preschools used picture storybooks with good quality language. A previous study revealed that, picture storybooks with interesting language promote children's vocabulary (Cohen, 1998). Reading picture storybooks to children also accelerates their language growth and eventually promotes later school achievements (Whitehurst et al., 1988 & Senechal et al., 1996).

The item 'The story is written in short sentences' in the aspect of language of the instrument requires further attention as all books scored very low in this item. This

emphasizes the need to write stories in shorter sentences. Although the international standard set for the length of sentences of preschool picture storybooks is 5 to 10 words per page, the length of sentences in Bangladeshi preschool picture storybooks exceeded that limit.

One of the exceptions to this is the Folk Tale '*Pinky O Tin Valuk*' (*Pinky and the Three Bears*) where short sentences are used on most of the pages along with wonderful illustration on each page. In evaluating the picture storybooks it is important to remember that the attention span of the preschoolers is short. Therefore, picture storybooks written in short sentences are more appealing to this age group. From this perspective the story 'Pinky and the Three Bears' would certainly be successful to evoke and hold the interest of the young preschoolers throughout the story telling session. The use simple and comprehensible words certainly extend young children's vocabulary. For example in one instance when the baby bear found that his little chair is broken, he cried out, 'Who broke my chair into pieces?' The use of these last two words 'into pieces' add life to the text as well as give the young readers the experience of using more words in their speech. Along with the text, the touchy illustration of the crying little bear would sure to evoke empathy among the young readers. Not many picture storybooks have such representation of language.

Format of the picture storybooks:

Most of the items in the aspect of Format, all books scored between 21 and 24 out of 30(Fig 5). Format of the picture story books have an important impact on the young readers' decision to read a story (Huck, 1979). This study confirmed that the format of most picture storybooks, used in Plan preschools, are of good quality. For example, the title page of the picture storybook '*Nouka Vromon*' (*A journey by Boat*) written by Mohammad Quazi Foysal, gives the essence of the whole story written inside through the illustration of an ant and a bee sitting in an empty nutshell. The glossy papers used in the book add a floating effect to the illustrated underwater world as well as make the book durable. The digitally printed books cover in different shades of blue, white, brown and pale yellow add in conveying the mood of the story.

In contrast, items indicating 'Varied spacing of picture and text', 'Attractiveness of endpapers' and 'Endpapers harmonizes with other pictures' scored comparatively lower in the aspect of the format.

The study results found that the spacing of the picture and text in most picture storybooks are not varied which might be monotonous to young children. This criterion needs little more attention as the spacing of the text on each page, a well chosen margin, the white space within a book contribute to the making of a quality picture storybook and eventually can hold the attention of the young readers (Huck, 1979).

Furthermore, none of the picture storybooks contained the endpapers - 'The first and the last pages of the book'. The absence of endpapers in all books again might be due to low cost budget for designing and making books for young children. The issue of adding endpapers was neglected in general.

Among all, the story '*Tin Shahoshi Chagoler Golpo*' (*The Story of Three Brave Goats*) has well representation of almost all the aspects related to illustration, content, language and format. In this adapted story, the use of colors in different shades of brown, grey, and pale yellow to portray the rocky mountain and the goats gave life to the illustrations of this story. The changing of expressions on the faces of the characters added meaning to the text and evokes reader's interest even more to read the story. The monster in the story was illustrated in such a humorous way that looking at its picture every time will make the young readers laugh rather than having a scary sensation while reading the story. The wonderful story content will leave a lasting effect on the young reader's mind even after reading the story will stop. The well designed title page with the picture of three goats looking far ahead would help the reader to anticipate the story inside. In addition, the well chosen font size, varied spacing of the picture and text on each page make the story more appealing to the reader.

Children find pleasure in the repetition of words and can appreciate figurative language, provided the comparisons are within the kingdom of their experiences (Huck, 1979). Use of 'Figurative language' referred to the description of something by comparing it with something else such as 'Tuni could run like the wind'. These

criteria, however, could not be included in the final instrument and had to be dropped due to the repeated inconsistent grading of the experts'. This might be due to allocation of time for analyzing the given picture storybooks was not sufficient. Though, only one out of 38 picture storybooks had contained figurative language and none of the picture storybooks contained repetition of words.

Summary and recommendation

The study results provide evidence that the picture storybooks used in the preschools of Plan Bangladesh are of high quality in different standard aspects. One possible explanation could be that special attention was given in the selection of these books to ensure quality. This explanation also necessitates further research to determine the quality of picture storybooks used in other preschools throughout Bangladesh where similar selection process may not have been followed.

Although this research was limited to determining the quality of picture story books, the findings will have important implications in the development of such instruments in measuring the quality of other types of story books. The lack of prior research on the quality of picture story books gave rise to the importance of this research. This was the first step in the process of developing an instrument to measure the quality of story books and therefore further development of the instrument should be considered.

The findings of this research can help authors of children literature in terms of which criteria to consider in making their writing more acceptable and enjoyable to young readers. In addition, the instrument will help program designers and implementers, and curriculum specialists to decide on balancing the combination of picture storybooks from different categories to be used in the preschool classrooms. Publishers of children's book may also use the insights gained from the research to help make informed choices in considering the important aspects of quality picture storybooks. This will help the process of selecting and developing picture storybooks for the forthcoming nationwide preprimary education. The findings can also be used to help teachers to identify developmentally appropriate and quality picture storybooks in other preschools, where storybooks are randomly selected without attention to set standards.

An important area for further research is to explore children's response to different types of storybooks. A deeper understanding of their perspectives and reactions to different types of stories would increase the quality and content of picture storybooks further. An instrument to assess children's preferred criteria in the aspect of illustration, content, language and format of picture storybooks is therefore of high importance.

Parents and teachers play a vital role in the development of young children. Reading storybooks to these youngsters is very common in Bangladesh country context. Parents and grandparents with little or no education background also tell stories to their children; often using only the pictures in the books. In the preschools, the teachers also use the picture storybooks as part of the school curriculum. Reading picture storybooks to young children is an effective way to communicate and build strong relationship with young children. Thus, both parents and teachers need to know the potentiality of quality picture storybooks and their role in guiding their children's love of books and reading. Together families, schools and the community can work together to create an opportunity where children have an access to abundance of quality literature.

In Bangladesh, the importance of development during the early years is an emerging and appreciated concept. The significance of early years has been recognized by both government and non-government organizations and brought them under one umbrella to work together. The initiative of implementing nationwide preschool program is the cornerstone of that effort. To accelerate positive outcomes of this effort, use of quality resources in preschool program is one of many fundamentals. Quality picture storybook is an important element to children's learning mechanism. The present study established that these picture storybooks should never be selected on the basis of face value or on one aspect alone without an accompanying evaluation of other aspects. This study opened a new realm of children literature through which forthcoming preschool program can be further enriched for the benefits of young children.

Acknowledgement

Accomplishing a research is never a single handed effort. Behind the scenery lie priceless contributions of many people and institutions. The researcher is thankful to her family for giving mental supports and allowing enough freedom to carry out this study by all means.

It is a pleasure for the researcher to extend the deepest sense of gratitude to Ms. Mahmuda Akhter, Head of Early Childhood Development Resource Centre, Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, for allowing her continuous support in order to complete this Masters thesis.

The researcher is thankful to Dr. Pia Rebello Britto, Associate Research Scientist, International Social Policy Program, for suggesting this problem. Also, a special thanks to Dr. Faith Lamb Parker, Assistant Clinical Professor, Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health, Columbia University for her valuable advice in continuing this research.

The researcher wishes to record a special note of thanks to the faculty of Masters of Science in Early Childhood Development for their valuable efforts for the smooth completion of the Masters course.

The researcher wishes special thanks to Professor Dr. Halima Khatun, Former Director, Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, for providing the book 'Children Literature in Elementary School' written by Charlotte Huck along with other resources, as well as her valuable advice. Without her cooperation it would really be difficult to concretize the research plan into action. The researcher is indebt to Professor Rafiqun Nabi, and Professor Syed Abul Barq Alvi, Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, author Nazia Zabeen, Mr. Shah Alam from Asiatic, colleagues from Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, also the research assistants who have given their valuable time and feedback in developing the tool to evaluate the picture storybooks.

It has been a great pleasure to work under the supervision of Dr. SB Jalal. The researcher is indebted to him for his cooperation through sharing delicate research skills and vast experiences. It is needed to add that without his valuable support and contribution it was impossible for the researcher to carry out this work. Lastly, the researcher is thankful to all the people of Shishu Academy and Bangla Academy for their unconditional support with the resource materials.

REFERENCES

- Aboud, F. E. (2006). Evaluation of an early childhood preschool program in rural Bangladesh. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 46–60.
- Aboud, F. E. (2009). The effect of preschool dialogic reading on vocabulary among rural Bangladeshi children. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 48, 12-20.
- Bodrova, E. & Leong, J. D (2006). Vygotskian perspective on teaching and learning early literacy. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*. New York. The Guilford Press.
- Beck, I. & McKeown, M.(2001). Text talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 10-20. Cited in Dwyer, J & Neuman, B. Susan (2008). Selecting books for children birth through four: A developmental approach. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*. 35, 489-494
- Cianciolo, J. Patricia (1970). *Picture books for children*. Chicago. American Library Association.
- Cohen, R. L, Belgray, B. A. & Fisher M. (1998), *Developmental consideration in selecting books for children*. Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland.
- Dearing E., Berry D. & Zaslow M.(2006). *Poverty During Early Childhood*. Blackwell handbook of early childhood development. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dwyer, J & Neuman, B. Susan (2008). Selecting books for children birth through four: A developmental approach. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*. 35, 489-494.
- Fletcher, L.K. & Reese, E. (2004). Picture book reading with young children: A conceptual framework. *Developmental Review*, 25, 64-103.
- Huck, S.C. (1979). *Children's Literature in the elementary school*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. New York.
- Hoffman, B.J. (1992). *Once upon a time----Together: An intergenerational reading program empowering teenage parents to develop the emerging literacy of their children while reducing their own literacy deficiencies*.
- McKeown, G. M. & Beck L. I.(2006). *Encouraging Young Children's Language Interactions with Stories*. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*. New York. The Guilford Press.

- Nikolajeva, M. (2003). Verbal and visual literacy: The role of picture books in the reading experience of young children. In Hall N., Larson J. & Marsh J., *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy*. SAGE.
- Ntuli, D., & Pretorius, E. (2005). Laying foundations for academic language competence: the effects of storybook reading on Zulu language, literacy and discourse development. *Southern African Linguistics & Applied Language Studies*, 23(1), 91-109. Retrieved from AcademicSource Premier database.
- Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education, (2008). Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Raikes, H., Pan, B. A., Luze, G., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Constantine, J. (2006). Mother-child bookreading in low-income families: Correlates and outcomes during the first three years of life. *Child Development*, 77, 924-953.
- Schickedanz, A. J. (1999). Much more than ABCs. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Washington, D.C.
- Senechal, M., Lefevre J.A., Hudson E. & Lawson P.E. (1996). *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 88, 3, 520-536.
- Snow, C.E. (2006). What counts as literacy in early childhood; In K. McCartney & D. Phillips (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of early childhood development*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitehurst J.G., Arnold S. D., Epstein N. J., Angell L. A., Smith M., and Fischel E.J. (1994). A picture book reading intervention in day care and home for children from low-income families. *Developmental Psychology*. 30, 5, 679-689.
- Whitehurst J.G., Falco L.F., Lonigan J.C., Fischel E.J., DeBaryshe D.B., Valdez Menchaca C.M. & Caufield M. (1988). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology*, 24, 4, 552-559
- Whitehead R M. (2002). *Developing Language and Literacy with Young Children*. Paul Chapman Publishing. New Delhi.

ANNEX

Picture Storybook Evaluation Tool:

For expert use:	For researcher use only:
Name of the Book: Author: Illustrator: Publisher: Year of publication: ISBN:	Code:

Instructions: Please read the story several times before you start analyzing the picture storybook. Go through each of the page and consider every minor detail in the illustration and text as you go through. Then rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a check mark in the appropriate box. Also, provide comment if you rate any of the following statements 'Undecided', 'Strongly disagree' or 'Disagree' while analyzing the book.

Illustration: (relationship to text)

Sl. No.		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1.	The pictures are accurate with the text.					
2.	The pictures are consistent throughout the text.					
3.	The illustrations help to understand the meaning of the text.					
4.	The illustrations evoke reader's interest while the text is being read.					
5.	The illustrations hold reader's interest while the text is being read.					
6.	The illustrations leave room for reader's imagination.					
7.	The illustrations stimulate creative thinking. ¹					
8.	Illustrations creating negative impression on child's mind are avoided.					
9.	The illustrations provide clues to the action of the story.					
10.	The main character in relationship to the text is correctly emphasized in every illustration.					

Comment on illustration (relationship to text):

--

¹ Specific thought processes which improve the ability to be creative and involves creation or generation of ideas, processes, experiences or objects.

Illustration: (medium and style)

Sl. No		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
11.	The medium ² used is appropriate for the mood of the story.					
12.	The colors used are harmonized with the mood of the story.					
13.	The style ³ of illustrations is appropriate for visualizing the story.					
14.	The techniques used in the illustrations harmonized with the mood of the story.					

Comment on illustration (medium and style):

² Such as watercolor, chalk, crayon, woodcut, collage, ink.

³ *Style* is the arrangement of line, color and mass into a visual image which is influenced by illustrator's particular skill as an artist and his vision of the story that is being interpreted.

Content:

Sl. No		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
15.	The plot ⁴ is well constructed to hold reader's interest to continue reading the story.					
16.	All the characters are well defined.					
17.	All the characters are consistent throughout the book.					
18.	The theme ⁵ of the story is appropriate for its intended age level					
19.	Both male and female characters in the story are presented with equal importance.					
20.	Socio-economic background of the characters is portrayed positively.					
21.	Religious background of the characters is highlighted in a positive manner.					
22.	Cultural backgrounds of the characters are well represented.					
23.	The characters reflect positive self image. ⁶					
24.	The content of the book is culturally appropriate ⁷ .					
25.	The book content is appealing to children.					

Comment on content:

⁴ The *plot* is the overall plan for the story.

⁵ The *theme* is the main idea that the writer wishes to convey.

⁶ That is the characters do not stereotype religion, ethnicity or gender.

⁷ That is issues that conflict Bangladeshi custom, heritage and culture are avoided.

Language:

Sl. No		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
26.	The story presents figurative language ⁸ .					
27.	The story presents repetition of the words.					
28.	The words used in the story are comprehensive for the child.					
29.	The story is written in short sentences. ⁹					
30.	Simple sentences are used in the story.					
31.	The conversation / dialogue are lively and credible.					

Comment on language:

⁸ Whenever you describe something by comparing it with something else, you are using *figurative language*. Example: Simon could run like the wind.

⁹ That is 5 to 10 words per page.

Format:

Sl. No		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
32.	The size ¹⁰ of the book is appropriate for the child.					
33.	The design of the book cover ¹¹ is attractive.					
34.	The design of the book cover conveys the spirit of the book.					
35.	The endpapers ¹² are of attractive colors or illustrations					
36.	The endpapers harmonize with other pictures in the book.					
37.	The title page is well designed.					
38.	The title page anticipates the story to come.					
39.	Spacing of pictures and text on each page varies and not monotonous.					
40.	The font type is well chosen for the theme and purpose of the book.					
41.	The font size is well chosen for the theme and purpose of the book.					
42.	The quality of the paper is durable.					
43.	The binding of the book will withstand heavy usage.					

Comment on format:

¹⁰ The book is both appropriate for reading to the child during the story times as well as for the child to handle the book on his own.

¹¹ A *book cover* is a protective covering used to bind together the pages of a book.

¹² These are the first and last pages of a book, one of which is glued to the reverse of the cover, while the other is not pasted down.

List of Picture Storybooks Used in the preschool of Plan Bangladesh:

Sl.	Title of the book	Category
1.	Boker chana tutul mitul	Animal story
2.	Kothai amar ma	
3	Nouka Vromon	
4.	Khorgoser jonmodin	
5.	Nijhum bone ganer asor	
6.	Sheyal O Haser chana	
7	Darkinar biye	
8	Bon theke sohore	
9	Tin sahosi chagoler golpo	
10	Roghur Oviman	
11	Ajob Juto	Fantasy
12	Misu , Tuli O pakhi	
13	Dotter deshe Onima	
14	Valuk O dui Bondhu	Fables
15	jadur apyesh bati	
16	Singho raj O nengti edur	
17	Boka kak O chalak sheyal	
18	Sheyal o angur fol	
19	Singorag o mosar lorai	
20	Porisromi pipre O olos gasforing	
21	pinky o tin bhaluk	Folk Tale
22	Gadhar hachi	
23	Nekre o sat chagol chana	
24	Shopna O mithur seyal dekha	Family Story
25	Ripa O Pichhi voot	
26	Moti cachar taka	
27	Hasur Budhhi	

28	Shathi Koja	Familiar Everyday Experiences
29	Hasur sorir	
30	Onko shekhar age	
31	Shopner Rajkumar	
32	Kurer Badsha	
33	Ghuri Orano	
34	Kochop er golpo	
35	Bondhu bananor golpo	
36	Dekhi aar shkhhi	
37	Manuser jonno	
38	Hirar Khabar Dabar	

Types and Themes of Picture Storybooks:

1. **Family stories:** Stories about child's immediate family.
2. **Animal stories:** Stories in which animals act like people, frequently like small children.
3. **Fables:** Short stories with a moral ending in which animals or occasionally the elements talk as human being.
4. **Folk tales:** These feature common folks and common place events. There may be some 'make believe' elements, such as, talking animals but the story overall sound logical even realistic.
5. **Fantasy:** Stories in this category are imaginative tales.
6. **Everyday Familiar Experiences:** Stories of everyday world.