

INFLUENCE OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT (3-5 YEARS)

By

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ID: 24155010

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

Brac Institute of Educational Development

Brac University

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing 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 which 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: Influence of Play-based Learning on Child Development (3-5 years)

Student name: Nusrat Tasnim

1. Source of population: Parents of Children (Aged 3-5) and Teachers of Private Kindergarten

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: no

d) Sensitive questions: no

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 be required (yes or no)

a) from study participants: yes

b) from parents or guardian: yes

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

Ethical Review Committee:

Authorized by: (chair/co-chair/other)

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the influence of play-based learning on the development of children aged 3–5 years. The research aimed to explore how play is understood and practiced in early childhood settings and how it supports children’s overall development. The study also aims to understand how parents’ perspectives on play and how they support play-based learning at home. Data was collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with parents. The findings indicated that play-based activities positively support children’s problem-solving skills, creativity, communication abilities, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Parents reported that storytelling, role-play, drawing, and interactive games enhanced children’s curiosity and active engagement in learning. Classroom observations revealed that teachers intentionally integrated play-based learning , such as- songs, group interactions and guided activities to facilitate learning while sustaining children’s attention and participation. Play in preschools mainly occurs through structured, teacher-guided activities rather than extended free play. It is often integrated with academic tasks such as counting, storytelling, and alphabet learning due to strong parental expectation for early achievement. However, observations also indicated that curriculum demands and time constraints often restricted opportunities for child-initiated, exploratory and open-ended play experiences within classroom settings. Opportunities for children-led and outdoor play are limited in some settings. Many parents understand that play is important for their child’s development, but still, they prioritize academic learning at home. They try to support play through storytelling, small games but play is often linked with letters, numbers or school tasks. Despite these limitations children consistently demonstrate higher levels of engagement, enthusiasm and active participation

during play-based learning compared to more traditional, worksheet based learning tasks. Because of academic pressure, limited space children do not always get time for free play. Overall parents value play but prefer it to be educational rather than just for enjoyment. Exploring this topic is important because early childhood is a critical period for holistic development, and play-based learning can contribute to building strong foundations for lifelong learning. The study contributes to a better understanding of current practices and perspectives related to play in early childhood education.

Keywords: Play-based Learning; Early Childhood Development; Parent Involvement; Cognitive Development; Social-Emotional Development; Qualitative Study

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List of Acronyms

BRAC IED	BRAC Institute of Educational Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

Introduction

Play-based learning allows children to explore, experiment, and discover ideas in meaningful and engaging ways. Unlike traditional rote learning, it emphasizes active participation, problem-solving, creativity, and social interaction, all of which are essential for holistic development (Whitebread, 2012). Play promotes children's free choice and peer learning (Vogt et al., 2019) and supports social, cognitive, emotional, language, and physical development, helping them build essential skills for school readiness and lifelong learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020). Through play, children enhance creativity, critical thinking, compassion, emotional regulation, and motor skills (Sitorus et al., 2025). Vygotsky (1978) further emphasized that children learn best through social interaction, much of which naturally occurs during play.

Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional development, and play is recognized as central to learning during this stage (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play-based learning is widely acknowledged as a developmentally appropriate approach for children aged 3–5 years (UNICEF, 2018). This age range represents a foundational stage when play becomes the primary medium for learning, language development accelerates, and social-emotional skills rapidly emerge (UNICEF, 2018). Experiences during these years strongly influence school readiness, self-regulation, early literacy, and peer relationships (OECD, 2021).

Play is also one of the most common and influential home experiences contributing to

children's development (Metaferia et al., 2021). In many contexts, including Bangladesh, parents increasingly recognize the importance of play for children's growth and well-being (UNICEF, 2019). When parents understand the educational value of play, they are more likely to support play-based learning at home and in early childhood education contexts, thereby fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development (Lin & Li, 2018). Research indicates that parents' beliefs about the importance of play guide their involvement in children's play activities. Parents who value play for its educational and cognitive benefits are more likely to provide play materials, participate in parent-child play, and facilitate early peer interactions (Metaferia et al., 2021). Since parents are key partners in children's play and learning (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012), understanding parental beliefs about play and how they support developmental outcomes at home is important.

International organizations such as UNICEF and the OECD emphasize that early learning environments should prioritize playful, child-centered experiences rather than formal academic instruction (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2018). Research exploring teachers' beliefs about play-based learning suggests that although many early childhood educators recognize play as foundational for holistic development, some express uncertainty or skepticism about its effectiveness for learning (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Furthermore, while play and playfulness are central to early childhood education, educators are not always fully aware of their role in intentionally fostering play (Vogt et al., 2018). Given that development during the ages of 3–5 years is shaped by both home and early childhood education (ECE) settings, it is essential to explore practices and perspectives in these environments.

In the Bangladeshi context, many parents express strong beliefs in holistic development and prefer enjoyable, interactive learning experiences for their children (Ali, Chowdhury, & Obaydullah, 2019). However, positive parental beliefs alone are insufficient if early childhood education settings do not effectively implement play-based principles in practice (Fisher et al., 2011).

This study focuses on understanding parents' views and early childhood education perspectives on play-based learning and child development. The participants include parents (both mothers and fathers) of children enrolled in preschool or early learning programs, teachers, and children. The findings may contribute to understanding how schools can consider parents' perspectives regarding play as pedagogy. By promoting collaboration between parents and educators, children can experience more meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that balance academic instruction with play.

Statement of the Problem

In Bangladesh, some parents are increasingly aware of the value of play; believe in the power of playful education, in other words, play as a pedagogy for the child's learning and development; and acknowledge its importance for children's holistic growth and wellbeing; however, play-based learning is not always widely available in the Bangladeshi early childhood education settings due to the curriculum design that overlooks the principle for learning through play and insufficient teachers' training (UNICEF 2019, Alam, 2022). It is evident that children in early childhood settings are not always motivated to participate in various activities; instead, they are often compelled to focus solely on textbooks (Alam, 2022). In other words, schools often continue to rely on teacher-led instruction,

memorization, and academic worksheets, even in preschool classrooms where children would benefit most from exploratory and hands-on learning (Pyle et al., 2017; Lynch, 2015). Thus, academic and cognitive skills development is the priority in the settings of early childhood education. As a result, parents who believe in child engagement and the importance of play-based learning experience difficulties in helping children prepare the same lessons at home (Alam 2022). Additionally, research indicates that when early childhood education practices emphasize academic outcomes over developmentally appropriate approaches, a gap often emerges between what parents believe young children need and what children experience in their learning environments (Pyle et al., 2017; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). In other words, existing studies suggest that early childhood classrooms often continue to emphasize academic instruction due to curriculum demands and systemic pressures, creating a disconnect between parental expectations and classroom practices (Ali, Chowdhury, & Obaydullah, 2019; Alam, 2022). Such misalignment may limit children’s opportunities for meaningful engagement, creativity, social interaction, and emotional development, even when parents provide supportive learning environments at home (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020; Pellegrini, 2009). In other words, by participating in early childhood education that emphasizes academic outcomes, children are deprived of holistic development during the early years of life in contemporary times (Khatun and Smita, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore parents’ understanding of play, their views on the importance of play-based learning for children 3-5 years in the context of early childhood education and home settings, and how these views align with classroom practices in early

childhood education settings in Bangladesh. Specifically, the study aims to understand parents' perceptions of the value and benefits of play-based learning, to identify whether and how preschools practice play-based approaches in daily classroom activities, and to recognize whether and how schools can benefit from the inclusion of parents' views regarding play-based learning to support early childhood development.

Significance of this study

Play-based learning is recognized as a central approach in early childhood education, promoting children's social, cognitive, emotional, and language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Hence, understanding how parents perceive play-based learning provides insight into the beliefs, experiences, and expectations that shape children's early learning environments. While parents in Bangladesh increasingly acknowledge the importance of play for holistic development (UNICEF, 2019), classroom practices in many preschools do not consistently reflect these beliefs (Ali, Chowdhury, & Obaydullah, 2019). This highlights the need for a qualitative exploration of both parental perspectives and the practice of play-based learning in early childhood classrooms.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of parents regarding play-based learning. By highlighting how parents' beliefs and schools' practices interact, this study can inform the relevance of considering parents' views in fostering play and playfulness in early childhood education and parent-school collaboration initiatives to support child development.

Essentially, this qualitative study contributes to both theory and practice by providing a context-rich understanding of parental views and practices in ECE settings regarding play-based learning for children aged 3-5 years. Additionally, research in Bangladesh remains

limited in examining how parents' beliefs about play-based learning align with practices in early childhood education settings. Thus, the research addresses a critical gap in the literature in Bangladesh by linking parental perspectives to classroom realities, thereby supporting the development of child-centered, play-based early education that aligns with international recommendations and promotes children's holistic growth (OECD, 2021; UNICEF, 2018).

Research Questions

1. What are parents' views on play and play-based learning to support child development?
2. How does play happen in pre-schools?
3. What are parents' views on how to support play-based learning in home settings?

Operational Definitions

Play-based Learning: In this study, play-based learning refers to structured and unstructured play activities that are intentionally used to support learning and development among children aged 3–5 years. It includes activities such as role-play, storytelling, drawing, block building, puzzles, outdoor games, and interactive parent-child play that promote active engagement, exploration, problem-solving, and social interaction in home and early childhood education (ECE) settings.

Child Development: Child development in this study refers to the holistic growth of children aged 3–5 years across four main domains: cognitive (problem-solving, thinking skills, early literacy and numeracy), social-emotional (cooperation, empathy, emotional regulation), language (vocabulary development, communication skills), and physical development (fine and gross motor skills).

Parents' Views: Parents' views refer to the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes held by mothers and fathers regarding the role and importance of play-based learning in supporting their children's overall development.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Settings: ECE settings refer to preschool or early learning centers where children aged 3–5 years are enrolled and where play-based or formal learning activities are conducted.

Children (3–5 Years): In this study, children aged 3–5 years refer to preschool-aged boys and girls who are enrolled in early learning programs and are in a developmental stage characterized by rapid cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical growth.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This section provides theoretical and empirical insights into the centrality of play and play-based learning in early childhood drawn from the vast scientific literature.

1. Understanding Play and Play-based Learning

Play can be defined as activities that 'are fun, voluntary, flexible, involve active engagement, have no extrinsic goals, involve active engagement of the child, and often have an element of make-believe' (Vogt et al., 2018). Indicators of play are often observed as characteristics of engagement in play: delight (including excitement, joy, satisfaction, inspiration, anticipation, pride and belonging); wonder (which entails the experience of joy, novelty, surprise and challenge) and choice (includes a sense of empowerment, autonomy, ownership, spontaneity and intrinsic motivation) (Ndabezitha and Gravett, 2024). These characteristics highlight that play is internally motivated and child-centered, allowing children to actively construct knowledge through exploration and interaction with their

environment rather than through passive instruction (Vogt et al., 2018). Such play experiences also promote children's curiosity and willingness to experiment, which are essential for early learning and developmental progress (Ndabezitha and Gravett, 2024).

Play involves a range of activities and behaviors encompassing day to day activities such as play on a swing, sliding, building with blocks, dancing to music, reading books, taking turns, singing, rhyming words and pretend play and further involves manipulating of objects including playing with assorted toys which should not just be colorful and attractive but should also be rich in stimulating problem solving skills, reciprocity, cooperation, creativity and basically promote learning and child development (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020). These everyday play experiences provide children opportunities to explore cause-and-effect relationships, develop imagination, and practice communication and social interaction skills through meaningful engagement (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020). Numerous taxonomies of play are in circulation. They are constructed along several interrelated themes. While some emphasize the content of play, distinguishing, for example, between functional, symbolic, and rule-governed play, others revolve around play behavior types, such as physical (e.g., exercise or rough-and-tumble play), object (involving purpose-made toys), or pretense play (e.g., role or socio-dramatic play) (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). These classifications demonstrate that play is multidimensional and contributes to different developmental domains, including physical coordination, social collaboration, and imaginative thinking (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Six stages of play outlined by sociologists include unoccupied play, solitary play, onlooker play, parallel play, associative play, and cooperative play and children progress through these six stages before they are five years old and once they master them, they will try out

other types of play such as competitive play, dramatic play, physical play, and constructive play (Singh and Ngadni, 2023).

Play-based learning is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the use of play in promoting multiple areas of children's development and learning; and free play and guided play are two types of play-based learning that guide early learning (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Through play-based learning, children engage in hands-on experiences that allow them to explore concepts, solve problems, and develop independence while enjoying the learning process (Ndlovu et al., 2023). It is also discussed that two ideas are useful to describe play-based learning: a) child-initiated and child-led free play with voluntary participation, no predetermined instructional aim and no adult intrusion; and b) structured, adult-led non-play with an avowed instructional purpose (c. direct teaching). Placed between free play and non-play, one may find variations of guided play and play-based learning (Bubikova-Moan, 2019). Guided play, which combines child choice with intentional adult support, is increasingly recognized as effective in balancing enjoyment and educational outcomes in early childhood education (Bubikova-Moan, 2019). Similarly, it was mentioned that when the term play is used in relation to children, free play is implied, that is children involved in self-directed free exploration and discovery with no or minimal interference from adults; and play with its inherent benefits can be harnessed for pursuing pre-determined learning goals related to school curricula through 'guided' play (Ndabezitha and Gravett, 2024). This approach allows educators and parents to support children's learning while still respecting children's autonomy, interests, and natural learning processes (Ndabezitha and Gravett, 2024). Along this continuum, adult roles may range from parallel players, teammates, mentors and guides to mostly supervising outsiders (Bubikova-Moan, 2019).

2. Play as an Essential Element in Child Development

Beyond entertainment, play is important for cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Moreover, play gives children opportunities to develop their skills of working in groups and sharing, negotiating, and resolving conflicts with others (Metaferia et al., 2021). In addition to supporting social interaction, play allows children to actively construct knowledge through hands-on exploration and experimentation, which strengthens their understanding of the world around them (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Play which is vital for all children, from birth till the age of eight promotes learning in a joyful manner that encourages children to enhance language, cognitive and social competencies apart from practicing self-regulation and obtain multidisciplinary content knowledge (Singh and Ngadni, 2023). Through play, children develop problem-solving skills, creativity, and self-regulation, which are foundational for school readiness and lifelong learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015).

Play-based learning is widely acknowledged as an effective and developmentally appropriate approach for children aged 3-5 years. It encourages children to explore, experiment, and engage actively in their learning, which supports cognitive, social, emotional, and language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). International organizations such as UNICEF and the OECD emphasize that early childhood education environments should prioritize playful, child-centered experiences over formal academic instruction. The OECD (2021) highlights that high-quality early learning settings integrate play as a key pedagogy, allowing children to construct knowledge through meaningful interactions. Similarly, UNICEF (2018) argues that learning through play is crucial for promoting holistic development, especially in the early years when children are

highly receptive to exploration and social engagement. Similarly, UNICEF (2018) argues that learning through play is crucial for promoting holistic development, especially in the early years when children are highly receptive to exploration and social engagement. These perspectives reinforce the idea that early childhood settings should balance structured learning goals with opportunities for creativity, exploration, and social interaction (UNICEF, 2018; OECD, 2021). Further research suggests that embedding play-based learning into structured curricula allows teachers to balance child-initiated and adult-guided activities, which enhances learning outcomes while respecting children's developmental needs (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Research also indicates that the quality of the play environment significantly influences children's developmental outcomes. A rich play environment, whether at home or in early childhood education settings, provides a variety of materials and opportunities for imaginative, socio-dramatic, and cooperative play, which stimulates cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Children learn best when they are actively engaged and allowed to make choices, experiment, and solve problems within meaningful contexts, which aligns with Vygotsky's emphasis on learning as a socially mediated process (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Furthermore, the involvement of parents and teachers in observing, guiding, and scaffolding children's play enhances both skill acquisition and social understanding, reinforcing the interdependence between individual development and social interaction (Fisher et al., 2011; Pellegrini, 2009).

3. The Socio-cultural Theory of Play

Social Constructivist Theory suggests that children learn best when they engage in meaningful social interactions, something that naturally happens during play (Vygotsky et al., 1978).

Perhaps a significant component of the socio-cultural theory is the aspect of “scaffolding,” which acknowledges the involvement of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (peer/adult) to guide the children towards the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Smolucha and Smolucha, 2021). This entails children playing independently, with just a little indirect guidance from an adult by way of asking questions, giving hints, or prompt and thus, significant others in the child’s environment, including parents, teachers, and the children’s more knowledgeable peers, occupy an important place in facilitating children’s play (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020). In fact, children’s early play experiences in their immediate home settings with parents as primary caregivers remain central in facilitating and initiating play activities in a home setting (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020). According to Lev S. Vygotsky (1896–1934), the highest levels of abstract thinking and self-regulation in preschool development are established in pretend play using object substitutions (Smolucha and Smolucha, 2021). The study highlights that collaborative play with peers encourages language development, perspective-taking, and cultural understanding, allowing children to internalize social norms and expectations in meaningful contexts (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021).

Overall, play functions not only as a vehicle for cognitive growth but also as a bridge between social interaction and individual development, reinforcing the idea that learning is inherently social and culturally mediated (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Vygotsky’s framework emphasizes that play provides opportunities for children to experiment with

social roles, practice self-control, and engage in guided problem-solving activities, which fosters both individual autonomy and social competence (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021).

4. Parents Interpreting Play

Parents are considered children's first and most influential teachers, and their beliefs strongly shape early learning experiences (Pellegrini, 2009). The home environment therefore becomes the first space where children experience opportunities for exploration, interaction, and meaning-making through everyday play experiences (Pellegrini, 2009). When parents recognize the value of play-based learning, they are more likely to provide rich learning environments at home and support educational programs in schools (Fisher et al., 2011). Such support may include providing play materials, engaging in conversations during play, and encouraging curiosity-driven activities that extend children's thinking (Fisher et al., 2011). Evidence suggests that parents who engage in playful interactions with their children contribute positively to children's language development, social skills, and problem-solving abilities (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Recent studies highlight how parental beliefs about play-based learning differ across cultural, social, and educational contexts. Metaferia et al. (2021) showed that parents' views about early childhood education strongly relate to the types of activities children engage in at home and the development of executive functions. Similarly, Kaur and Ngadni (2023) found that many preschool parents acknowledge the importance of play-based learning but still hold mixed understandings of how play supports academic and holistic development. These mixed understandings often create uncertainty about how much time should be allocated to free play versus structured academic tasks (Kaur and Ngadni, 2023). In some contexts, parents worry that too much play may affect school readiness. O'Gorman

and Ailwood (2012) reported that parents in Australia often feel children “get fed up with playing” and prefer more formal learning as children approach school. These perceptions show that parents’ expectations can sometimes conflict with the principles of early childhood pedagogy.

In contrast, research from Zambia by Lungu and Matafwali (2020) revealed that while many parents appreciate the value of play, their support depends on factors such as awareness, communication from educators, and cultural beliefs about learning. This suggests that strengthening parental understanding of play-based learning could enhance children’s developmental experiences both at home and in early learning centers.

5. Play in Early Childhood Education

Play has been identified as a pedagogical strategy aimed at enabling children to have adequate play opportunities to explore their environment as they learn and develop (Lungu and Matafwali, 2020). Play, both indoors and outdoors are usually designed in various forms to create sustained opportunities to develop young children’s peer relationships, language, symbolic and imaginative thinking, physical development, and problem-solving skills; hence, to develop language, motor, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities, various forms of play are therefore required to support and facilitate meaningful learning opportunities (Singh and Ngadni, 2023). A balanced play environment that includes creative, physical, and socio-dramatic activities allows children to experience holistic development rather than isolated skill acquisition (Singh and Ngadni, 2023).

While unstructured play allows children to negotiate, share, work in groups, resolve conflicts, and learn self-advocacy skills, move and play at their own pace, discover their

own interests, and learn decision-making; the type of play used in most preschool settings is structured play or guided play where a teacher sets up intentional targets to directly teach academic skills and concepts including materials such as block; sandpaper letters for finger tracing, sand trays for writing letters, brushes, paints, and jumbo pencils etc. (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Guided play, therefore, serves as a bridge between child-initiated exploration and teacher-directed instruction, allowing learning objectives to be met while maintaining elements of choice and engagement (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Research exploring the impact of play-based learning on the development of children in early childhood education and care centers revealed that the practitioners in rural areas had an insufficient understanding of teaching using play pedagogies, which had a negative impact on standard provisions for play pedagogies suited for young children (Ndlovu et al., 2023).

In sum, although there is global evidence supporting the benefits of play-based learning, research focusing on parents' views and Pre-school perspective in Bangladesh is still limited. The few existing studies highlight a lack of awareness of play-based learning among teachers (Alam, 2022). Hence, there is a clear need to understand how parents in Bangladesh view play-based learning and how pre-schools practice the approach for the development of children aged three to five years.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Approach

This study followed a qualitative research approach to explore parents' beliefs and experiences related to play and play-based learning. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of how individuals make meanings of their experiences within real-life contexts. Qualitative research focuses on

participants' perspectives rather than numerical data (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019). Since parents' views on play and their practice, as well as the practice of private kindergartens centering play-based learning, are shaped by cultural expectations, personal beliefs, and daily interactions with their children, these perspectives are best captured through open-ended, descriptive methods. The qualitative approach supported the use of semi-structured interviews and observations, which together provided rich insights into how play-based learning is understood and practiced at home and in early childhood settings in Bangladesh.

Research site

This research was conducted in different areas of Dhaka, including urban neighborhoods (Banani and Kafrul). These areas were selected because they have families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, allowing to see how children's early experiences might vary across different environments. Additionally, Private kindergartens for children aged 3-5 years are available in these areas, making them suitable settings for observing play-based learning practices.

Research participants

The participants of this study were parents whose children were enrolled in Bangla-medium private preschools or ECE settings, specifically private kindergartens. Both mothers and fathers from different income families were included to ensure that the study reflected a variety of experiences and perspectives regarding play-based learning. A total of 6 parents were interviewed using semi-structured interview guidelines. In addition, classroom practices involving teachers and children from 2 private kindergartens were observed to understand how play-based learning was implemented in practice.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Research Participants

Participant ID	Parent's Gender	Age of Parent (Years)	Child's Gender	Age of child (Years)	Occupation of Parent
P1	Female	31	Female	5	Homemaker
P2	Female	32	Male	4.5	Homemaker
P3	Female	29	Male	3	Office Worker
P4	Male	36	Female	4	Banker
P5	Female	34	Female	5	Homemaker
P6	Male	38	Female	3.5	Businessman

Sampling Procedure/Participants Selection Procedure

The study involved 6 parents of children aged 3-5 years and 2 private kindergartens from 2 different areas. From each area, 3 parents were selected for interviews and one kindergarten was selected for classroom observation. The children of the selected parents fall within the 3-5 years age range, as the study focuses on understanding play and play-based learning experiences in early childhood.

Firstly, this study selected parents based on their involvement in their children's daily activities, caregiving roles and willingness to share insights about play and learning at home and school. This was measured by conducting initial informal discussions where parents were asked about their daily activities with their children, their involvement in play activities and how they support their children's learning and development. Parents who actively engaged in play activities such as participating in pretend play, providing play materials, encouraging creative activities or facilitating learning through play prioritized for inclusion in the study.

Secondly, parents' awareness and understanding of play and play-based learning were assessed during the semi-structured interview focused on parents' definitions of play, recognition of play activities, perceived benefits of play for children aged 3–5 years, views on the goals of early childhood education, opinions about ECE centers, and ways of supporting play at home, participants were selected who were able to reflect on and discuss these areas. Parents were asked preliminary questions about how they support their child's play, how they view the kindergarten's role in learning, and whether they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and opinions. Parents were also selected based on their willingness to discuss their involvement in supporting play-based learning. Those who expressed willingness to share detailed insights were included in the study.

Private Kindergartens were selected purposively based on their provision of early childhood education for children aged 3–5 years and their use of play-based teaching practices. Selection criteria included the incorporation of play activities into daily classroom routines, availability of play materials, and opportunities for structured and unstructured play. One kindergarten from each selected area was observed to explore how play-based learning is implemented in practice.

The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants and settings were information-rich and directly relevant to the research objectives. This approach enabled the collection of detailed qualitative data on parents' perceptions of play, the purposes of early childhood education, and the support of play-based learning in early childhood.

Data collection Tool

For this study, semi-structured interviews with parents and classroom observations were employed to comprehensively understand parents' perspectives on play-based learning and how it is implemented in early childhood settings.

The semi-structured interviews allowed for one-on-one, in-depth conversations with parents, providing an opportunity to explore their beliefs, experiences, and practices related to play and child development. Open-ended questions enabled parents to reflect on how they support play at home, the benefits they perceive from play-based learning, and their views on the role of kindergartens in facilitating learning through play (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016).

Classroom observations provided insight into how play-based learning is practiced in private kindergarten settings, including teacher-child interactions, types of play activities, children's engagement, and the integration of play into learning. Observing the classroom environment allowed the researcher to see first-hand how children responded to different play activities and how teachers facilitated learning through structured and unstructured play.

Together, these two methods offered a robust approach to examining both parental perspectives and actual classroom practices, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how play-based learning influences the development of children aged 3–5 years.

Data collection method and procedure

For data collection, a semi-structured interview guideline was developed in alignment with the objectives of the study. The guideline was designed to explore parents' understanding of play and play-based learning for children aged 3–5 years. It included open-ended

questions focusing on themes such as parents' definitions of play, how they recognize play activities, perceived purposes and benefits of play for young children, their views on the goals of early childhood education, their opinions about the kindergarten their child attends, and how they support play-based learning at home. These questions were intended to encourage descriptive, reflective, and experience-based responses from parents.

The semi-structured interview guideline consisted of eight main questions, with additional questions used when necessary to gain deeper clarification. The guideline was piloted before the final data collection to ensure clarity and relevance of the questions. The pilot was conducted in Bangla, and minor adjustments were made based on participants' feedback to improve the flow and understanding of the questions.

In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted in two private kindergartens (one from each selected area). The observation guideline focused on key aspects of play-based learning practices within the classroom. These included the types of play activities provided (structured and unstructured), availability and use of play materials, teacher-child interactions during play, children's level of engagement, and the integration of play into academic learning. Special attention was given to understanding whether play was meaningfully embedded in the learning process or used as a break from formal instruction. The observations also examined how teachers facilitated play, encouraged participation, supported creativity, and responded to children's ideas and interactions.

The data collected through interviews and observations were qualitative and non-numerical in nature. Before conducting the interviews and observations, the researcher scheduled appointments at times convenient for the participants and obtained permission from

kindergarten authorities. All participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The interviews were conducted in settings comfortable for the parents, ensuring privacy and ease of conversation. Each interview began with informal discussion about family background, daily routines, and the child's general activities to build rapport. This was followed by the main open-ended questions from the interview guideline. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes.

Classroom observations were conducted during regular school hours and lasted approximately 60–90 minutes in each setting. The researcher maintained a non-participant role to minimize disruption and took detailed field notes during and immediately after each session.

At the end of each interview and observation session, participants and school authorities were thanked for their time and cooperation. The combination of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations provided a comprehensive understanding of how play-based learning is perceived by parents and practiced within kindergarten settings.

Data Management and Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to carefully organize and interpret the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with parents and classroom observations in private kindergartens. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim to ensure that their words and meanings were accurately captured. Observational notes were written in detail to reflect children's engagement, teacher interactions, and the implementation of play-based learning activities in the classroom.

Once all data was prepared, the transcripts and observation notes were read multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with the content and to gain a clear understanding of how play-based learning is perceived and practiced. During this process, meaningful ideas, recurring patterns, and significant experiences related to play and play-based learning were identified. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected parents' views on play at home, teachers' approaches to play in the classroom, and children's responses to different play activities.

The analysis process was iterative, meaning that themes were revisited and refined as new insights emerged from the data. Once the main themes were developed, a more focused analysis was conducted to highlight findings that directly addressed the research questions. Data from parent interviews and classroom observations were compared to explore similarities and differences in how parents and teachers support play-based learning and contribute to children's development. This approach ensured that the final themes genuinely represented participants' perspectives and classroom practices, providing a rich and credible understanding of how play-based learning is valued and implemented both at home and in early childhood settings. Thematic analysis was particularly suitable for this study because it allowed for a systematic yet flexible exploration of patterns, experiences, and insights within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Subsequently, a second, more focused analysis was conducted to identify and highlight data that directly addressed the research objectives and questions. The researcher carefully consolidated these findings and presented them in a clear, organized written form, incorporating direct quotations from parents and descriptive examples from classroom observations. This approach allowed the study to capture participants' perspectives and

experiences authentically, providing concrete evidence of how play-based learning is understood and practiced at home and in kindergarten settings. By linking participants' narratives with observed classroom practices, the analysis ensured that the findings were grounded in real experiences, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research outcomes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the semi-structured interview guideline and observation framework were reviewed and refined with guidance from the thesis supervisor. A pilot study was conducted with a small number of participants to assess the clarity and relevance of the questions, and necessary adjustments were made before the final data collection. To maintain reliability and accuracy, detailed notes were taken during interviews and observations, and all interviews were transcribed promptly, ensuring that participants' perspectives and classroom practices were accurately captured.

Ethical Issues

The study followed strict ethical guidelines and was approved by BRAC University prior to data collection. Oral consent was obtained from all parents before conducting interviews and from teachers before classroom observations, ensuring that participation was fully voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences.

To protect privacy, all personal information was kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Interviews and observations were conducted with respect and sensitivity, particularly when discussing personal experiences or parenting practices,

to ensure that participants felt comfortable and safe sharing their perspectives. Only data from those who willingly consented to participate were included in the study.

Limitation of Study

This study had several limitations. The sample was small, including only 6 parents and 2 private kindergartens from two areas, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other communities or settings. Parents' understanding and perceptions of play and play-based learning varied, which sometimes made interpreting responses challenging. Observations were limited to a single session in each kindergarten, which may not fully capture the daily practices or children's engagement in play-based learning activities.

The study also relied heavily on self-reported data from parents, which could be influenced by recalling bias or social desirability bias, with participants potentially presenting their practices in a more favorable light. Environmental factors, such as limited space, resources, or competing daily responsibilities, may have affected both children's engagement in play and the quality of play-based learning observed. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricts understanding of how play-based learning influences child development over time. Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples, conducting multiple observation sessions, and using longitudinal designs to provide deeper insights into the impact of play-based learning on children's development between the ages of 3 and 5 years.

Chapter 4: Results/Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussions in this chapter are based on information gathered from 6 semi-structured interviews with parents and 2 classroom observations in Dhaka. The findings are structured according to the research questions, focusing on parents' understanding of

play-based learning, how they support play at home and how play is practiced in early childhood classrooms. The observation findings highlight teacher-child interactions, children's engagement during play, types of play activities observed.

The discussion further examines the findings by connecting participants' perspectives and classroom practices with existing research on play-based learning. This helps to better understand how play is viewed and practiced in both home and school settings in Bangladesh.

Results/Findings

The study involved six parents from Dhaka City (four mothers and 2 fathers) with children aged 3-5. The parents were between the ages of 29 and 38 and most of the mothers were full-time caregivers, while their spouses were office workers, businessman. Their daily schedules are mostly focused on taking care of the house, with little time spent with the children engaging in play. The families reside in urban and semi-urban places

Families generally had busy daily routines, balancing work, household responsibilities and childcare. While children had access to preschool education, opportunities for play-based learning at home were limited due to time constraints and household responsibilities. Despite these challenges, parents attempted to support their children's learning through play.

Theme 1: Parents' Understanding of Play and Its Role in Child Development (3-5 years)

Sub-theme 1.1: Defining Play

Parents' perceptions of play varied widely. Some described play simply as fun or free time for children, while others linked it to learning or skill development.

Play as entertainment. Most parents across the interviews viewed play primarily as an enjoyable activity that allows children to relax, have fun or stay occupied. One mother explained, "For me, play is when child run, jumps or draws for fun" (Interview #2, 18/01/26). During classroom observation, children spent time coloring and building with blocks often independently while teacher supervised from distance (Observation #1, 15.01.26). In this understanding, play is largely associated with enjoyment rather than specific learning outcomes.

Play as learning. A smaller, but notable group of parents connected play to learning and development. One father stated, "Play is how my child learns numbers, letters and colors while having fun." (Interview #4, 22.01.26). another mother described play as a way for her child to practice social skills: "When she plays with her friends, she learns to share and talk nicely" (Interview #5, 22.01.26). These parents saw play as both enjoyable and purposeful, they believed it supports children's cognitive, social and emotional skills.

Although fewer parents emphasized the educational aspect of play, these insights suggest that some families recognize the role of play in supporting children's learning and overall development. Observations in preschool classrooms also reflected this perspective, where teachers integrated activities such as storytelling, counting games, and role-play to foster both learning and enjoyment.

Sub-theme 1.2: Awareness of Play's Benefits

Parents' awareness of the development benefits of play differed. Many could identify general benefits, such as keeping children happy or occupied but were less likely to describe specific cognitive, social or emotional outcomes. One mother admitted, "I know play is important, but I haven't really thought about how it helps my child learn" (Interview #1, 19/01/26).

Some parents did link play to skill development. For example, one father noted, "Through play, my child learns patience, sharing and even thinking creatively" (Interview #6, 22/01/26). Similarly, classroom observations showed that guided play activities such as building blocks or drawing encouraged problem-solving, cooperation and fine motor skills among children.

These findings indicate that while parents value play in this context, their understanding ranges from seeing it as simple enjoyment to recognizing its role in holistic development. Awareness of play's broader development benefits appears to be emerging especially among parents who engage more actively with their children during play.

Sub-theme 1.3: Everyday Challenges That Limit Play Opportunities

Parents also highlighted challenges that limit children's play opportunities at home. Busy schedules, household chores and small living spaces often restricted the time and freedom children had for play. One mother said, "I want to play with my child, but I have cooking and cleaning, so my child mostly plays alone" (Interview #3, 19.01.26). Fathers working long hours also contributed to limited parent-child play time.

In preschool settings, although teachers encouraged play, classroom space and curriculum requirements sometimes constrained free, child-led play. These barriers suggest that while

parents and teachers recognize the importance of play, practical and environmental factors influence how much children can engage in meaningful play experiences.

Theme 2: How Play is Practiced at Home and in Preschool

This theme explores how play-based learning is practiced at home and preschool settings for children aged 3-5 years. While parents and teachers acknowledged the importance of play.

Sub-theme 2.1: Play Practices at Home

Play at home was generally informal and integrated into daily routines. Most parents described play as short activities that take place after school or during free time. Common activities included drawing, watching cartoons, playing with toys, storytelling and simple pretend play such as cooking games or teacher-student play with dolls.

Many mothers shared that they encouraged educational play such as practicing alphabets, numbers or rhymes through playful interaction. One mother mentioned that she sometimes turns learning into game by asking her child to identify colors or count objects while helping with small households' tasks (Interview #3, 19/01/26). During observation, children were often seen playing independently while mothers completed household responsibilities (Observation #2, 19/01/26).

Play at home was not always planned with development goals in mind. Parents tended to view play to keep children occupied or entertained rather than as a deliberate learning strategy. Despite this, children indicated that children demonstrated communication skills, creativity and problem solving skills through these everyday playful experiences.

Sub-theme 2.2: Play Practices in Preschool

Classroom observations indicated that play-based activities were used to engage children during lessons. Children participated in group songs, action rhymes and guided activities related to letters and numbers. During these activities, most children appeared attentive and actively involved (Observation #2, 21/01/26). They followed instructions, responded to questions and showed enthusiasm while participating in movement-based or song-based learning tasks.

However, in some sessions, academic tasks such as worksheet completion and direct instruction limited opportunities for free or child-initiated play. In these moments, children were more passive and less verbally expressive compared to play-based segments of the class.

These observations suggest that while play-based strategies were present in the classroom, they were often balanced with academic expectations, particularly in Bangla-medium private preschools.

Theme 3: Perceived Contribution of Play-based Learning on Child Development (3-5 Years)

This theme explores how play-based learning influences different areas of child development among children aged 3-5 years. Based on parent interviews and classroom observation, play appeared to contribute to language development, social interaction, cognitive growth and emotional regulation. Although parents did not always intentionally label activities as ‘developmental’ the impact of play was visible in children’s behavior and skills.

Sub-theme 3.1: Play in Supporting Language Development

Many parents reported that their children developed speaking skills, vocabulary and confidence through play. They commonly identified storytelling, pretend play, rhymes and role play as activities that support language growth.

One mother shared-

“My child plays teacher-teacher at home. She teaches her dolls and repeats what her teacher says in class. Through this, she learns new words and speaks more clearly”
(Interview #1, 19/01/26)

Another parent mentioned:

“When he watches rhymes and sings along, he remembers the word quickly. Now he talks more and asks many questions.” (Interview #2, 19/01/26)

These improvements were also visible in classroom observations. During action songs and group recitation, children actively responded and repeated words with enthusiasm (Observation #2, 21/01/26). In contrast, during worksheet-based tasks, some children were quieter and less verbally expressive.

These findings suggest that playful learning environments create opportunities for children to experiment with language in a relaxed and enjoyable manner, strengthening their communication skills.

Sub-theme 3.2: Role of Play in Developing Social Skills Through Play

Play-based learning also appeared to influence children’s social skills. Parents noted that when children play with siblings, or peers they gradually learned sharing, turn-taking and cooperation. One mother explained-

“When my child plays with other children, sometimes they fight but then they solve it and play again. Slowly she is learning how to adjust.”

(Interview #6, 22/01/26)

Another parent observed:

“If I play with him, I teach him to wait for his turn. At first, he used to get angry but now he understands better.”

(Interview #2, 19/01/26)

Classroom observations supported these statements. During group activities and circle time, children followed collective instruction and engaged with peers (Observation #1, 16/01/26). However, in more structured academic sessions, peer interaction was limited. These moments indicate that play serves as a natural space where children practice social skills and develop confidence in interacting with others.

Sub-theme 3.3: Play in Supporting Cognitive Development

Parents frequently linked play with learning numbers, colors and problem-solving skills. Activities such as block building, puzzles, counting objects and drawing were described as helping children think more independently.

One mother stated:

“When we count fruits or toys during play, my child learns numbers easily. She understands faster when it feels like a game.”

(Interview #4, 22/01/26)

In preschool observations children were more attentive during interactive learning activities that included songs and movement (Observation #1, 15/01/26). During such sessions, children appeared curious and eager to participate.

These findings suggest that play-based learning encourages exploration and persistence by supporting early cognitive development in meaningful ways.

Sub-theme 3.4: Role of Play in Emotional Development

Through pretend play and imaginative activities children expressed feelings such as happiness, excitement and frustration. Parents observed that after playing children often appear calmer and more cooperative at home (Interview #5, 22/01/26).

During classroom activities involving movement and songs children showed visible enjoyments, smiling, laughing and actively engaging with peers (Observation #2, 20/01/26). In contrast during strict academic tasks some children appeared less expressive.

These findings suggest that play provides children with a safe space to release emotions build confidence and experience a sense of achievement.

Discussion

This study explores how play-based learning influences the development of children aged 3-5 years in urban families whose children attend Bangla-medium private preschools. Through semi-structured interviews with parents and classroom observations, the study examined parents' understanding of play, how play is practiced at home and in preschool and how it contributes to child development.

The findings reveal that while parents widely acknowledge the importance of play, their understanding of its developmental role varies (Ali et al., 2019; Singh & Ngadni, 2023). Play is often seen as a natural and enjoyable activity for children but not always recognized as a structured learning strategy (O'Gorman & Aliwood, 2012). At the same time, both home and preschool environments provide meaningful opportunities for development through play although the nature and depth of engagement differ across contexts (Lin & Li, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Theme 1: Parents' Understanding of Play and Its Role in Child Development

One important finding of this study is that parents do not share a single, consistent definition of play (Ali et al., 2019). Some described play as any activity that keeps the child engaged and entertained such as playing with toys, watching cartoons or spending time outdoors. Others connected play more directly with learnings especially when it included counting, drawing, storytelling or practicing rhymes (Lin & Li, 2018; Metaferia et al., 2021).

These findings are consistent with previous studies in Bangladesh and other contexts, where parents often value play but lack a deeper understanding of its role in holistic development (Ali et al., 2019; Khatun & Smita, 2024)

This variation indicates that parents' perceptions of play are influenced by their educational background, daily responsibilities and exposure to early childhood education practices (Khatun & Smita, 2024; Lin & Li, 2018). While most parents recognized that play makes children 'happy,' 'active' or 'smart' fewer were able to clearly explain how play supports deeper development areas such as problem solving, emotional control or social skills (Ali et al., 2019; Whitebread et al., 2012).

Similar patterns were also reported by O'Gorman and Aliwood (2012), who found that parents tend to prioritize academic learning over play due to school readiness concerns.

When play is viewed mainly as entertainment, opportunities for Intentional Development support may be limited (O'Gorman & Aliwood, 2012). However, even when not planned deliberately, everyday play experiences still appeared to positively contribute to children's growth (Pellegrini, 2009).

However, the partial awareness observed in this study suggests a gradual shift in parental attitudes towards recognizing play as a learning tool (Singh & Ngadni, 2023). Overall, there seems to be a small gap between valuing play and fully understanding its broader developmental significance. This suggests that the need to strengthen parental awareness about how play supports holistic child development (Singh & Ngadni, 2023; UNICEF, 2018).

Theme 2: How Play is Practiced at Home and in Preschool

The study revealed noticeable differences between how play is practiced at home and preschool settings. At home, play was usually informal and flexible. It often took place within daily routines and many parents allowed children to play independently while they managed household or work responsibilities (Lin & Li, 2018). This difference between home and preschool practices reflects findings from Lin & Li (2018), who highlight that parental time constraints often limit active engagement in play at home. In some cases, parents joined their children in storytelling or role play, but these depend largely on time and energy.

In contrast, classroom observations showed a more structured use of play-based strategies. Teachers incorporated songs, movement activities, and interactive exercises to teach letters, numbers, and basic concepts (Fisher et al., 2011; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). At the same time, the structured play observed in classrooms aligns with research emphasizing the effectiveness of guided play in enhancing learning outcomes (Fisher et al., 2011; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). During these activities, children appeared more attentive, enthusiastic, and willing to participate compared to more structured academic tasks such as completing worksheets.

However, the observations also reflected the academic expectations present in preschools. In some instances, academic pressure limited opportunities for free or child initiated play (Lynch, 2015; Pyle et al., 2017). The restriction of free play due to academic pressure is also widely documented in early childhood settings (Lynch, 2015; OECD, 2021). This reflects an ongoing tension in early childhood education between play-based approaches and early academic achievement (OECD, 2021; UNICEF,2019).

These findings are consistent with research suggesting that guided play can strengthen learning when appropriately balanced with instructional goals (Fisher et al., 2011).

While both home. And peaceful environment supports development , the level of intentionality and the structure in play differs significantly (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Influence of Play-based Learning on Child Development

The findings clearly indicate that play-based learning support multiple areas of child development. These findings strongly align with existing literature that highlights play as a critical tool for supporting multiple domains of development (Whitebread et al., 2012).

In terms of language development, children were more verbally expressive during songs, storytelling and pretend play (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2018). Parents mentioned that their children often repeat classroom dialogues at home or use new words during role play. Observations confirmed that children were more communicative and confident during interactive activities then during passive learning tasks. In particular, the observed improvements in language and social interaction reflect findings from Hirsk-Pasek et al. (2015), who emphasized the role of interactive play in communication development.

Regarding social development, play creates natural opportunities for children to practice sharing, cooperation and resolving small conflicts (Pellegrini, 2009; Whitebread et al., 2012). Both parents' interviews and classroom observations showed that peer interaction during play helped children build social confidence and adjust their behavior within group settings.

In the area of cognitive development, activities such as puzzles, counting games, drawing and block building encourage children to think, explore and persist when facing small challenges (Alam, 2022; Sitorus et al., 2025). Children appeared more curious and engaged when learning felt playful rather than forced.

Finally, in terms of emotional development, play provided a space where children could express feelings freely and release energy (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021; Vygotsky et al., 1978). Parents observed that their children were calmer and more cooperative after engaging in play. Classroom observations also show visible enjoyment and excitement during movement based activities. This suggests that play supports emotional regulation and positive mood. Furthermore, the emotional benefits identified in this study are consistent with Vygotsky's theory, which positions play as essential for emotional regulation and self-development (Vygotsky et al., 1978).

These findings support developmental perspectives that emphasize play as a central element of early childhood growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Play based learning not only supports academic readiness but also strengthens emotional resilience and social competence during the foundational year of development.

Overall, these findings suggest that play-based learning should be more intentionally supported both at home and in preschool settings. While parents and teachers recognize the value of play there is a need to deepen understanding of how play directly contributes to children's language, social, cognitive and emotional development. Increasing awareness among parents and maintaining a balanced approach between academic expectations and developmentally appropriate play in preschools could further strengthen children's holistic growth. The findings of this study are largely consistent with both global and local research, reinforcing the importance of integrating play-based learning more intentionally in early childhood education systems (UNICEF, 2018; OECD, 2021). This study highlights that for children aged 3-5 years play is not simply an enjoyable activity, but a meaningful way for learning and development.

Conclusion

This study sets out to explore how play-based learning influences child development of aged 3-5 years of families whose children attend preschools. The findings reveal that play is not merely a source of enjoyment for children but a meaningful and powerful context for learning and development. Through parents' perspectives the study highlights how play supports children's language growth, social interaction, cognitive skills and emotional regulation during these foundational years.

Although most parents value play and recognize its importance, their understanding of its deeper developmental role varies. For some, play is mainly viewed as entertainment, while others connect it more directly with learning. This difference suggests that there is still a gap between appreciating play and fully understanding how intentionally guided play can strengthen holistic development. At the same time, preschools attempt to integrate play-

based strategies yet academic expectations sometimes limit opportunities for child initiated and exploration play. One of the key insights of this study is that play becomes most effective when it is supported with awareness, engagement and balance. Simple activities such as storytelling, role play, songs and interactive games create meaningful learning experiences without requiring expensive materials. When parents and teachers intentionally support these playful interactions, children appear more confident, expressive, curious and socially engaged.

Reflecting on this research journey it has deepened my understanding of how everyday interactions shape early childhood development. Listening to parents' experiences made it clear that even within busy family routines, small efforts to support play can make a significant difference in children's growth. This study strengthens my belief that play-based learning is not optional approach but an essential foundation for development in the early years.

In conclusion, promoting greater awareness of play-based learning among parents and maintaining developmentally appropriate practices in preschools are crucial for supporting children aged 3-5 years. By creating environments where play is valued, guided and balanced with academic learning we can help ensure that children develop not only academically but also socially, emotionally and cognitively in holistic way.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Increase parental awareness in families about the developmental importance of play-based learning**, particularly how intentional play supports language, social, cognitive and emotional development.
- **Organize short parent workshops or orientation sessions** in preschools to share practical and low-cost play activities such as storytelling, pretend play, drawing and interactive conversations.
- **Maintain a balanced approach in preschools between academic instruction and developmentally appropriate play** ensuring that children have opportunities for guided and child-initiated play.
- **Integrate more interactive and movement-based learning activities** in classroom routines to enhance children's engagement, curiosity and confidence.
- **Strengthen collaboration between parents and teachers** by encouraging regular communication and sharing strategies to support play-based learning consistently at home and preschool.

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Appendices

Appendix-1: Research Tools (English)

A. Semi-Structured Interview Guideline (For Parents):

Demographic Information of Participants-

- Name of the Parent:
- Date and Place of Interview:
- Age of the Parent:
- Gender of Parent (Male/Female):
- Child's Gender (Male/Female):
- Age of Child:
- Occupation of Parent:
- Daily time spent with child:

Interview questions:

1. How would you define 'play' for your child?
2. How do you recognize or identify what constitutes play?
3. How do you see the purposes and benefits of play for children aged 3-5 years?
4. What do you think are the main goals and purposes of early childhood education?
5. What aspects of the ECE centers do you like the most?
6. How is play practiced in the kindergarten where your child study?

7. Why is it important to support children in play at home settings?
8. How do you support play-based learning in home settings?

Thank you.

B. Classroom Observation Tool:

Observation Details-

- Date:
- Time: From ____ to ____
- Location of Observation:

Descriptive Notes:

- Teacher-child interactions during play.
- How teachers introduce, guide, and support play activities.
- Children's engagement, curiosity, and peer interactions.
- The types of play observed (pretend play, blocks, art, outdoor activities).
- Availability and use of materials in the classroom.

Reflective Notes:

- Whether play supports physical, social, cognitive, emotional, or language development.
- Other reflections that emerge from class observations.

Appendix-2: Translated Research Tools (Bengali)

ক. অর্ধ-গঠনমূলক সাক্ষাৎকার নির্দেশিকা (অভিভাবকদের জন্য) (Semi-Structured

Interview Guideline (For Parents)

অংশগ্রহণকারীর তথ্য:

- অভিভাবকের নাম:
- সাক্ষাৎকারের তারিখ ও স্থান:
- অভিভাবকের বয়স:
- লিঙ্গ (পুরুষ/মহিলা):
- শিশুর লিঙ্গ (ছেলে/মেয়ে):
- শিশুর বয়স:
- পেশা:
- শিশুর সঙ্গে দৈনিক সময় কাটানোর সময়:

সাক্ষাৎকারের প্রশ্নসমূহ:

১. আপনি আপনার শিশুর জন্য ‘খেলা’ কীভাবে সংজ্ঞায়িত করবেন?
২. আপনি কীভাবে চিহ্নিত করবেন কোন কার্যকলাপকে খেলাধুলা বলা যাবে?
৩. আপনার মতে ৩-৫ বছর বয়সী শিশুদের খেলাধুলার উদ্দেশ্য ও উপকারিতা কী কী?
৪. আপনার দৃষ্টিতে প্রাথমিক শৈশব শিক্ষার প্রধান লক্ষ্য ও উদ্দেশ্য কী কী?
৫. প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা কেন্দ্রের কোন দিকগুলো আপনার কাছে সবচেয়ে ভালো লাগে?

৬. আপনার সন্তানের যে কিভারগার্টেনে পড়াশোনা করে সেখানে খেলাধুলা কীভাবে আয়োজন করা হয়?

৭. বাড়িতে শিশুদের খেলাধুলা সমর্থন করা কেন গুরুত্বপূর্ণ?

৮. আপনি বাড়িতে খেলাধুলাভিত্তিক শেখাকে কীভাবে সমর্থন করেন? ধন্যবাদ।

খ.শ্রেণিকক্ষ পর্যবেক্ষণ সরঞ্জাম (Classroom Observation Tool)

পর্যবেক্ষণের বিবরণ:

- তারিখ:
- সময়: ____ থেকে ____ পর্যন্ত
- পর্যবেক্ষণের স্থান:

বর্ণনামূলক নোটস (Descriptive Notes):

- খেলাধুলার সময় শিক্ষক-শিশু সংযোগ ও যোগাযোগ।
- শিক্ষকরা কীভাবে খেলাধুলা পরিচয় করান, পরিচালনা করেন এবং সমর্থন দেন।
- শিশুদের মনোযোগ, আগ্রহ, ও সহপাঠী সাথে যোগাযোগ।
- পর্যবেক্ষণ করা খেলাধুলার ধরন (ভান খেলা/pretend play, ব্লক, চিত্রকলা, বাইরে খেলা)।
- শ্রেণিকক্ষে সামগ্রী উপলব্ধতা এবং ব্যবহার।

প্রতিফলনমূলক নোটস (Reflective Notes):

- খেলাধুলা কি শারীরিক, সামাজিক, বৌদ্ধিক, আবেগীয়, বা ভাষাগত বিকাশকে সমর্থন করছে কিনা।
- শ্রেণিকক্ষ পর্যবেক্ষণের মাধ্যমে উদ্ভূত অন্যান্য প্রতিফলন।

Appendix-3: Consent Form

Title of the Study: Influence of Play-Based Learning on Child Development (3-5 years)

Researcher Name: Nusrat Tasnim

Institution: BRAC Institute of Educational Development (IED)

Purpose of the Study:

I am conducting this study as part of my master's thesis to understand how parents view play and play-based learning and the role teachers play in preschool education. The information you share will help me explore how play-based learning is perceived by parents, supported by parents at home, and practiced in early childhood settings.

What Participation Involves:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview/facilitate classroom session where I will ask you some questions about your thoughts and experiences regarding play-based learning or observe the sessions. The discussion will take 30–45 minutes and the observations will continue as long as the class continues. With your permission, I may take notes or record the conversation or observations for accuracy.

Confidentiality:

All information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. Your name and identity will not appear in any report or publication. Any quotes used will be anonymous.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Benefits and Risks:

There are no known risks involved in this study. While you may not receive direct benefits, your insights and activities will help improve understanding of how parents and teachers understand and support children's learning through play, which shapes child development.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher Name: Nusrat Tasnim

Email:

Participant's Consent Statement:

I have read the information above (or it has been read to me). I understand the purpose of this study and agree to participate voluntarily. I know that I can withdraw at any time without any problem.

Participant's Name:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Signature:

Date: