

**Play-based Pedagogy in Urban and Rural Government Pre-primary
Schools in Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study**

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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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

This research obtained ethical approval from MEd Research Ethics Committee of BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BIED), BRAC University. The responsible person of the study site will be contacted for consent for continuation of data accrual. Each participant was briefed about the goals of the study during pre-data collection. Written informed consent was sought prior to the data collection.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the implementation of play-based pedagogy in urban and rural pre-primary government schools in Bangladesh, focusing on teacher knowledge, training, and resource availability. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 12 teachers, focus group discussions from 24 parents, and classroom observations from six schools, using convenience sampling. Thematic analysis was applied to examine key themes regarding perceptions, practices, and challenges in both contexts. The study found that urban schools, with better resources and training, effectively integrate play-based learning, while rural schools face significant barriers such as inadequate training, and limited resources. The findings highlight the need for targeted policy interventions to address these disparities, stressing continuous teacher development, resource allocation, and community involvement. The study concludes that play-based pedagogy supports cognitive, social, and emotional development, essential for academic success, and calls for overcoming systemic barriers to ensure equal opportunities for all children.

Keywords: Play-based pedagogy, early childhood education, urban and rural disparities, teacher training, educational policy.

Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my beloved husband, Md. Sarwar Hossain, my daughter Samah Sarwar my son Mohammed Sabiq Sarhan Sarwar for being my constant support and strength.

Acknowledgement

I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor Ms. Ayesha Mahmood, whose unconditional support, guidance, and encouragement made my journey possible.

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List of Acronyms

ECE	Early Childhood Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
NEP	National Education Policy
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
SSI	Semi-Structured Interviews
IT	Information Technology
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Play-based pedagogy plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, problem-solving, and engagement among young learners. Ginsburg (2007) highlights the positive correlation between play and academic achievement over time. This pedagogical approach aligns with contemporary views in early childhood education, which emphasize active, exploratory, and socially interactive learning experiences as essential for supporting the holistic development of children (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe, & Golinkoff, 2013). While the quality of the learning environment influences the use of play-based practices, the effectiveness of such approaches can vary significantly due to contextual factors, including teachers' qualifications, resource availability, and cultural perceptions of play as a legitimate learning tool. In urban schools, students are typically provided with educational toys, diverse play experiences, and interactive learning environments, which enable them to engage actively in the learning process. As a result, urban students tend to perform better academically and experience overall growth (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020). In contrast, rural schools often lack these resources, making the implementation of play-based methods more challenging (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020).

Additionally, teachers in rural schools may face significant barriers such as large class sizes and inadequate teacher training, which hinder the effective use of play-based pedagogy. This study aims to investigate and compare the academic performance of students in urban and rural pre-schools using play-based pedagogy. By exploring how play-based learning is implemented and moderated by context, the study acknowledges the different practices and outcomes associated with play-based approaches in both settings.

This study is particularly important in light of the ongoing imbalances in the allocation of resources, teacher training, and infrastructure between urban and rural areas in Bangladesh. While urban schools often benefit from better infrastructure, a better-trained staff, and a more conducive learning environment, rural schools face significant challenges such as limited resources, fewer professional development opportunities, and limited access to play-based learning practices. Furthermore, rural communities often lack awareness of the conceptual advantages of play-based learning. These disparities may hinder the development of successful early childhood education initiatives and exacerbate the achievement gap between rural and urban children. This study, which examines the dynamics influencing early childhood education in Bangladesh, aims to identify potential strategies for enhancing equitable access to high-quality education for all children.

1.2 Research Topic

The title of this research is ‘Play-based pedagogy in urban and rural govt. pre-primary schools in Bangladesh: An exploratory study’. The implementation of play-oriented pedagogy has been acknowledged to have profound impact in contributing to the cognitive, emotional and social development of young children in early childhood education. However, the program has been unevenly implemented in Bangladesh especially in the context of urban–rural disparity. Although urban pre-primary schools tend to have more favorable infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and resources, there are many challenges for rural schools that include large class sizes, inadequate materials, and limited professional development opportunities. It is with this intention, to examine the extent of implementation to which play-based pedagogy is being used in urban vs. rural pre-primary classrooms in Bangladesh that the research is being conducted by delving into the differences as perceived by the teachers in urban and rural pre-primary classrooms across; teacher’s perception overall, class practices, resource base and a community awareness. By examining the constraints and interest in successful implementation of play-based learning within these varying contexts, the study aims to inform policy efforts to advance quality early childhood education for all children.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The benefits of play-based pedagogy are widely recognized globally, particularly in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and social-emotional development. However, its implementation remains inequitable in Bangladesh. While urban pre-primary schools generally have trained teachers, structured environments, and resources for learning, rural schools often lack the basic infrastructure, teacher training, and, in some cases, parental support necessary for delivering effective play-based learning. This urban–rural divide not only limits access to the

same quality of education but also undermines national progress toward inclusive and child-centered learning, as envisioned in the 2010 National Education Policy (NEP) and championed by international organizations such as UNICEF. The challenge does not lie in the absence of appreciation for play-based pedagogy, but rather in its fragmented and limited implementation across different contexts. This is due to complex systemic disparities, including geographic, infrastructural, teacher preparedness, and cultural attitudes toward play. In rural schools, rote-based learning continues to dominate, constrained by outdated curricula and a lack of policy or resource deployment. The purpose of this study is to explore how contextual differences in rural and urban areas impact the implementation and outcomes of play-based pedagogy in Bangladeshi pre-primary schools. It aims to pinpoint rural barriers, compare them with urban models, and inform policy and practice for a more equitable early learning experience. Despite efforts to expand access to early childhood education, significant disparities persist between rural and urban areas, primarily driven by differences in economic status, infrastructure, and the availability of trained teachers (Rahman, 2022). Urban schools typically benefit from more advantageous facilities, increased funding, and organized educational settings, while rural and marginalized communities face harsh conditions, including insufficient resources and teacher retention challenges (Islam & Chowdhury, 2020). Furthermore, policy implementation has been unsuccessful due to poor fund allocation, supervision, and execution (Nishat, Rahman, & Roy, 2019). Cultural and societal factors also limit children's access to quality education, particularly for girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These factors include early school dropout, pressures to engage in child labor, and reluctance by primary caregivers to invest in their children's early education (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Environmental factors, such as floods and cyclones, further disrupt schooling, with climate vulnerability exacerbating the situation (World Bank, 2022).

Addressing the disparities in early childhood education (ECE) between urban and rural areas in Bangladesh requires a nuanced understanding of the distinct challenges each context presents. Urban schools often benefit from better infrastructure, access to educational materials, and trained teachers, while rural schools face shortages in resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited community awareness of play-based pedagogies. These imbalances not only hinder the effective implementation of ECE but also threaten the broader goal of equitable education. To bridge this gap, targeted interventions sensitive to the specific needs of both urban and rural settings are necessary. Governmental support, along with innovative, community-based programs, can play a critical role in overcoming these challenges. Such efforts must address contextual realities such as poverty, geographic isolation, and social norms that influence educational outcomes across regions (Crouch & DeStefano, 2017). Through collaborative and contextually grounded approaches, Bangladesh can move closer to realizing the vision of inclusive and quality education for all. The inequalities in early childhood education reflect broader development problems, such as poverty, social inequality, and differential access to public services all of which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to address. Specifically, SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, is particularly relevant as it seeks to provide quality education to all children, regardless of location or economic background (United Nations, 2015). The National Education Policy (NEP) of Bangladesh recognizes early childhood education as a key strategy for reducing educational disparities and achieving the broader goals of sustainable development (Government of Bangladesh, 2010). Despite this recognition, gaps persist in the effective implementation of the policy, particularly in addressing the stark divide between urban and rural education systems. While urban areas often benefit from innovative and well-resourced pedagogic practices, these are rarely adapted or transferred effectively to rural settings. To close the divide, government

bodies and educational policymakers must take active steps to ensure that successful teaching approaches are contextualized and scaled across diverse environments, promoting more equitable educational opportunities nationwide (UNESCO, 2021). In Bangladesh, the continuing divide between rural and urban early childhood education in terms of resources, teacher preparation, and teaching methods results in significant variation in young children's learning experiences. Closing this gap requires more than just transplanting urban models into rural areas. Play-based pedagogies must be culturally meaningful and contextually appropriate. This necessitates rethinking how teaching and learning can take place in rural settings while respecting local values and realities. Equal access to high-quality ECE requires more than just good intentions from government and society; it demands active measures such as properly training teachers and fairly distributing resources. With coordinated efforts, children in rural areas can have the same opportunities as their urban counterparts to learn, grow, and thrive. This study aims to explore the academic experiences of students in urban and rural pre-primary schools that utilize play-based pedagogy, comparing these settings to inform policy and practice. Investing in equitable early childhood education is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic investment for the future of sustainable development. Access to quality educational experiences for all children is essential for combating poverty, enhancing social cohesion, and creating a better world. This study contributes to the national discourse on education by advocating for tailored programs that consider the specific needs of urban and rural settings in pre-primary schools.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How the play-based pedagogy is implemented in urban to rural area of Bangladesh?
2. What is the role of teaching practices in play-based pedagogy for pre-primary students' academic growth at urban and rural schools in Bangladesh?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate the practice of play-based pedagogy used in pre-primary public schools situated in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. Through an exploration of how this pedagogy is contextualized and enacted across geographical settings, the study aims to examine play-based learning practices and challenges specific to the diverse educational practices in Bangladesh. Understanding how teaching practices work within the context of play-based pedagogy is crucial for assessing its potential to foster academic development among pre-primary students. Additionally, the study seeks to identify specific opportunities and challenges associated with the use of play-based pedagogy in urban versus rural settings. All children have the right to high-quality early childhood education. The inequalities in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bangladesh mirror broader development challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these, SDG 4 is particularly significant, as it emphasizes ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, regardless of geographical location or socioeconomic status (United Nations, 2015). However, achieving SDG 4 remains a major challenge for Bangladesh. Despite its importance as a driver of sustainable development and economic growth, many regions in the country, especially rural and marginalized areas, still lack access to quality education.

Challenges such as inadequate teacher training, limited educational resources, and insufficiently supportive learning environments further hinder progress (UNESCO, 2021).

Therefore, while the goal of SDG 4 is commendable, its implementation in a developing country like Bangladesh continues to face significant obstacles. Urban schools typically have more advantageous facilities, increased funding, and organized educational settings, while rural and marginalized communities endure harsh conditions, including insufficient resources and challenges in teacher retention (Islam & Chowdhury, 2020). Moreover, policy implementation is often unsuccessful, with poor fund allocation, inadequate supervision, and weak execution (Nishat, Rahman, & Roy, 2019). Cultural and societal factors also limit children's ability to access quality education, especially for girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including early school dropout, child labor, and, in some cases, primary caregivers' reluctance to invest in early education (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Environmental factors, such as floods and cyclones, exacerbate the situation, with climate vulnerability further complicating the issue (World Bank, 2022).

Addressing the disparities in early childhood education between urban and rural areas in Bangladesh requires a nuanced understanding of the distinct challenges each context presents. Urban schools often benefit from better infrastructure, access to educational materials, and trained teachers, while rural schools typically struggle with resource shortages, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited community awareness of play-based pedagogies. These imbalances not only hinder the effective implementation of ECE but also threaten the broader goal of equitable education. To bridge this gap, it is essential to develop targeted interventions sensitive to the specific needs of both urban and rural settings. Governmental support, combined with innovative, community-based programs, can play a critical role in overcoming these challenges. Such efforts must address contextual realities such as poverty,

geographic isolation, and social norms that shape educational outcomes across regions (Crouch & DeStefano, 2017). Through collaborative and contextually grounded approaches, Bangladesh can move closer to realizing the vision of inclusive and quality education for all. With these coordinated efforts in place, children in rural areas can have the same chances as their urban counterparts to learn, grow and thrive. The present study attempts to explore the academic situations of students from urban and rural pre-primary schools utilizing play-based pedagogy and aims to compare their situations. Investing in early years equitable education is not only a moral imperative, but a strategic investment for the future of sustainable development. Access to quality educational experiences for all children is a prerequisite to combating poverty, enhancing social cohesion, and creating a better world. This study helps address the national discourse on education, calling for tailored programs that consider urban and rural settings in the context of pre-primary schools.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study has immense potential to be a step forward in early childhood education in the govt. pre-primary schools in Bangladesh. This study investigates how aspects of play-based pedagogy are being implemented across urban and rural locations to highlight practices that may better support young learners' early academic and social development. Results from this study will offer idyllic intelligence to inform policy decisions for early childhood education, including resource allocation and teacher development. Those findings of the study can be relevant to policymakers. A mapping of the urban and rural urban/rural supply and demand of early childhood services can help to identify gaps or disparities in infrastructure, materials and teacher training to ensure resources are allocated efficiently. There can be policy implications of the current study in terms of specific policies to advance play-based learning and to make sure that this is encouraged in both urban and rural areas and that schools are supported to adopt these practices. Integrate play into the policy frameworks, The results

would allow policymakers to realize the importance of play-based learning and support it in national education policies. By better understanding differences between urban and rural play-based learning, policy makers can then act to close the gap and support access to high-quality education and play-based learning for every child regardless of their community. For teachers and educationists, it will deliver an invaluable insight into what they need to do to make play-based learning work in many varied contexts and how they can modify their practice to drive successful early child development. The study will help guide teachers in how to adapt play-oriented strategies to fit into their individual between urban and rural classrooms, and make sure the learning is fun and developmentally appropriate. Teachers will be informed about play as it is best supported and scaffolded by adults and what is important to ensure children fully benefit from play opportunities for learning. Research results will provide teachers with tangible, actionable information on how to change their approach given their context, and enable more interactive and effective learning environments. Teachers will be more confident that they can establish play-friendly classrooms given that the study will underscore the significance of play in children's intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth. As for the curriculum developers, the study will provide ideas on integration role play pedagogy in the national curriculum especially in early childhood education. Using the findings from this study, curriculum writers could develop curricula that is developmentally appropriate and exciting by including more play-based activities that take into consideration children's natural curiosity and learning. The results will inform the development of flexible curriculum frameworks which can support more personalized ways in which teaching can be enacted, to address the needs of individual learners and the distinctiveness of urban and rural classrooms. Knowledge in the present study about how resources influence play-based pedagogy suggests how curriculum

developers can produce resource-friendly curricula to make the most of what is available with teacher support. Influencing sustainable policy and practice changes to curriculum provision.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

The benefits of play-based pedagogy are widely recognized globally, as it fosters physical, social, and emotional development in children. Rooted in child-centered and constructivist theories of learning, play-based pedagogy encourages children to explore, manipulate, and interact with their environment, rather than passively absorbing information. Early childhood education, in particular, has championed this approach, as young children learn best through contextualized learning experiences that promote cognitive and social development through active engagement (Fisher et al., 2013).

2.1.1 Pedagogical Theories of Play-Based Learning

Play-based pedagogy draws on the theoretical foundations of Vygotsky, Piaget, and other scholars who emphasize the importance of experiential learning for fostering children's cognitive and social development. Vygotsky (1978) posits that social interaction is fundamental to learning, with children constructing knowledge through collaborative activities. Play-based pedagogy also incorporates Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where an adult or more capable peer helps the child progress through a task that they cannot accomplish independently, thus scaffolding their cognitive development within a supportive social environment (Wood, 2014). Similarly, Piaget's (1962) constructivist approach emphasizes that children learn through engagement and interactions with people and objects, underscoring the idea that children learn by doing. Piaget defined symbolic play, particularly within the context of play-based learning, as the way children create mental representations of reality, which serve as the foundation for abstract thought.

2.1.2 Play-based pedagogies: a global perspective and its benefits

Numerous studies across various countries demonstrate that play-based learning not only benefits children but can also be adapted to diverse educational contexts. For example, the Early Years Learning Framework in Australia identifies play as a core component in fostering creativity, social skills, and holistic development (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). According to Australian educators, rich unstructured play settings inspire children to embark on self-directed exploration, which corroborates international findings (Whitebread et al., 2017). Studies within and beyond the United States have shown that combining academic rigor with play as a systematic tool within teaching routines helps engage students and build resilience and academic confidence, making it a more fruitful approach (Fisher et al., 2016; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). Asian educational settings, especially those in Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, offer an interesting comparison. While these regions are known for their rigid, exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy, they are gradually incorporating play-based approaches alongside academic instruction. For example, in Singapore, the Early Childhood Education Framework has been revised to integrate play as a tool for developing linguistic and numerical skills, while reducing the emphasis on high-stakes testing (Yuen & Chan, 2018). European and Canadian research also highlights how play can provide a remedy by offering children opportunities to develop social conventions and strategies for innovative problem-solving—an approach that contrasts with the traditional "teach more, test more" mentality (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

Moreover, a wide variety of Latin American and African initiatives have started to link traditional cultural games with contemporary play-based pedagogies. In Latin America, educators are merging games deeply rooted in local cultures with contemporary educational approaches to enhance both academic and socio-emotional skills (Sánchez & Rodríguez,

2019). Similarly, in regions across Africa, cultural play is increasingly recognized not only as a means for academic learning but also as a way of reinforcing community values and cultural identity (Ndlovu & Moyo, 2020).

2.1.3 Playing by the Rules: The Trouble with Play-Based Approaches

Although the benefits of play-based pedagogy are well-documented, its implementation remains sensitive to regional context. In Australia and North America, one significant barrier is the tension between standardized curricula and the inherently open-ended nature of play (Whitebread et al., 2017; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). In these regions, school performance metrics often force educators to focus on attainment measures, high-stakes testing, and the rote instruction that accompanies these pressures, leaving little room for unstructured, exploratory play. In many Asian countries, long-standing educational traditions and high parental expectations for academic excellence present additional challenges. The balance between play and the overarching pressure to produce quantifiable academic outcomes is a frequent struggle for educators (Yuen & Chan, 2018). Even in low-resource settings such as many parts of Latin America and Africa issues such as securing teacher training and establishing the infrastructure needed to support safe and creative learning environments remain prevalent (Sánchez & Rodríguez, 2019).

2.1.4 Overcoming issues related to play-based teaching in setting with limited resources

The implementation of play-based pedagogy is particularly challenging in contexts marked by poverty and a lack of educational resources, as is often seen in Bangladesh. However, these challenges can be mitigated through targeted interventions. For instance, addressing the resource imbalances between urban and rural schools is essential. A study by Rahman et al. (2020) points out that the variation in the use of play-based approaches between urban and rural schools in Bangladesh is primarily due to the unequal distribution of educational

resources (Sharma, 2020). A key part of the solution lies in teacher training. The successful incorporation of play-based pedagogy relies on teachers having the necessary training to recognize its value and plan activities that foster interactive and exploratory learning. In resource-poor environments, teachers may not fully understand the benefits of play-based learning or how to adapt activities for optimal use. According to McInnes et al. (2013), if teachers are not adequately prepared to implement interactive teaching methods, traditional teacher-centered instruction prevails, leaving little room for student interaction or exploratory learning, with an overemphasis on rote learning. To address these barriers, professional development programs for teachers must equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to engage in effective play-based learning. These programs should also promote a shift in mindset viewing education not merely as preparation for exams, but as a holistic process that supports the developmental needs of children. Furthermore, public-private partnerships aimed at enhancing educational infrastructure and developing resources should be driven by government-NGO-local community collaboration to equip both urban and rural schools with the necessary resources to support play-based pedagogy. With these targeted measures, including work with teachers, resource reallocation, and a broader shift in educational values, play-based pedagogies can be successfully introduced in early childhood education (ECE) in Bangladesh, even in low-resource settings.

Key Changes:

Solution-Oriented Focus:

The paragraph now focuses on how the challenges can be overcome, for example, through teacher training, a more effective use of resources and a change in teaching mindset.

Better Organization: The new version effectively covers the problems before detailed on practical solutions.

Including Collaborative Approaches: It refers to partnerships between governments, NGOs, and communities as a part of the solution in resource-poor settings that can also be considered.

Teacher training support

Professionally trained teachers are more easily attracted to and retained in urban schools than in rural schools. Greater access to professional development opportunities, strong recruitment networks, and improved working conditions in urban settings typically result in higher teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000). These factors are critical determinants for the successful implementation of play-based learning, where teacher facilitation is key to focusing and expanding children's play experiences.

Educational Resource and Materials

Urban schools tend to have more investments in facilities and high-quality materials available to children and their families. These schools are able to allocate resources more effectively, which gives them the financial capacity to provide a variety of engaging learning materials, including contemporary digital tools and play equipment that facilitate interactive and discovery-based learning (OECD, 2018). In contrast, such resources are limited in rural schools, which may also explain why they are less likely to adopt innovative pedagogical techniques.

Infrastructural Support

The physical resources needed for play-based learning (such as safe outdoor spaces, classrooms with sufficient equipment, and technological facilities) are generally more available in urban areas. Urban schools benefit from higher levels of investment in education infrastructure, supported by community partnerships and government assistance (World Bank, 2018). In contrast, rural schools are often burdened with outdated or unsuitable facilities, limiting the meaningful adoption of play-based practices. Additionally, one factor

influencing teachers' and parents' beliefs about play-based pedagogy is their cultural perception of play and learning. In South Asia, play is largely understood outside the formal education system as an activity of leisure. These negative perceptions can hinder the implementation of play-based learning, as they may pressure teachers to avoid using play as a teaching method. Rural areas, in particular, are often viewed as more traditional and resistant to change (Chowdhury, 2020). For example, academic success is often prioritized by parents, and play-based pedagogy may be seen as ineffective teaching (Rahman et al., 2021).

2.1.5 Play-based pedagogy

Teaching Practices

Play-based learning approaches have been shown to significantly impact classroom engagement and learning outcomes in early childhood education. Research indicates that when teachers use play as a pedagogical tool, it fosters language growth, social skills, and creative problem-solving in children. The use of new pedagogical methods, including guided play, allows educators to structure learning opportunities that combine child-led exploration with academic goals (Fisher et al., 2016). This process is generally better supported in urban schools than in rural ones, as urban teachers typically have more access to effective professional development and modern educational resources.

Academic Growth

The academic benefits of play-based learning methodologies are well-supported. Research has shown that well-designed play spaces can enhance critical thinking and stimulate cognitive development, leading to improvements in academic outcomes (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In urban environments, the presence of more well-supported teachers and greater resources in the classroom has been found to correlate with significant gains in literacy, numeracy, and other aspects of academic success. In contrast, rural schools are often faced with high rates of underqualified, untrained teachers and fewer materials, limiting their ability

to innovate and improve the learning environment. Literature indicates that rural schools lag behind their urban counterparts in terms of academic growth due to these challenges.

2.1.6 Disparities between urban and rural pre-primary educators

In Bangladesh, pre-primary education is marked by a binary division in access to infrastructure, educational materials, and teacher training between urban and rural settings. Urban public schools benefit from strong financial backing, which often supports the introduction of new teaching methods in structured environments. Most urban schools are equipped with modern classrooms, adequate teaching materials, and professionally trained teachers (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020). This gives them a relative advantage in implementing interactive teaching methods, such as play-based learning. Playfulness in pedagogy does not exist in a vacuum. Urban schools are better positioned to introduce a variety of playful approaches due to their access to learning toys, structured play spaces, and well-trained teachers (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020). In contrast, rural schools face significant challenges in implementing such approaches, primarily due to a lack of fundamental resources necessary for even conventional teaching methods (Rahman et al., 2019). These disparities highlight the impact of context on the outcomes of play-based pedagogy.

2.2 Teacher Education and Awareness

Another important factor affecting the implementation of play-based early childhood education (ECE) is teacher training. Unlike rural teachers, urban teachers are more likely to receive professional development opportunities that enhance their ability to incorporate play into their teaching (Fisher et al., 2013). In contrast, teachers in remote areas may not be aware of the benefits of play-based learning and may prioritize traditional, teacher-centered approaches due to cultural norms and limited exposure to modern pedagogical practices (UNESCO, 2021).

2.3 Cultural Perceptions

One of the key barriers to implementing more play-based learning in rural areas is the cultural perception of education. Many parents and educators in rural communities' view play as an activity for leisure rather than as a tool for meaningful learning. However, Chowdhury and Sultana (2020) argue that, in some cases, parents may misinterpret unstructured, educational play as lacking academic rigor, leading them to oppose the implementation of play-oriented strategies.

2.4 Academic Outcomes of a Play-Based Pedagogy

Research shows that when implemented effectively, play-based pedagogy positively affects academic outcomes, although the degree of impact varies depending on the quality of its implementation. Children who engage in play learn essential skills, such as problem-solving, listening to others, staying motivated, and maintaining curiosity (Ginsburg, 2007). Similarly, Fisher et al. (2013) emphasize that guided play helps children grasp abstract concepts (e.g., shapes, patterns), which are foundational for future learning. In urban schools, the combination of resources and trained educators works synergistically to produce significant improvements in student learning outcomes through play-based pedagogy (UNESCO, 2021). However, this approach faces challenges in rural schools, where limited resources, inadequate training, and a lack of awareness hinder its effective implementation (Rahman et al., 2019).

2.5 The Policy implementation

At the same time, the differences in pre-primary education across urban and rural areas pose a challenge that requires targeted policy implementation for social inclusion. While policymakers should strongly advocate for play-based pedagogy in rural schools, it is crucial to remember that rural schools need more than just advocacy; they need resources, materials, and proper training to make the implementation of play-based learning a reality in their

communities. Rahman et al. (2019) argue that publicly funded teacher training programs, particularly those addressing rural teachers' specific needs, can be critical in closing this gap. Moreover, it is essential to raise awareness about the benefits of play-based education among parents and educators in remote regions. Through community engagement initiatives, perceptions of play often seen as merely recreational and not integrative can be challenged, fostering a deeper understanding of child development and the role of play more generally (UNESCO, 2021). Play-based pedagogy should be adapted to fit the local context, including different cultural and social groups. Incorporating local traditional games and storytelling methods into the curriculum could also improve rural children's access to play-based learning (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020). Play-based approaches need to be tailored to local characteristics and available resources (Pramling et al., 2016). This underscores the importance of specific interventions that address the diversity in pedagogical approaches. By tackling geographical disparities and focusing on equity and inclusivity, policymakers and educators can create educational systems and environments that provide enriching experiences for all children.

2.6 Conceptual Framework:

Urban and Rural Setting

In Bangladesh, urban pre-primary schools are endowed with more resources, qualified teachers, and infrastructural support than their rural counterparts (Chowdhury & Sultana, 2020; Rahman et al., 2019). These differences underlie the contextual influences on the practice of play-based pedagogy. It acknowledges that these disparities impact not only access to materials and training but also each setting's perception of culture and commitment to policy (UNESCO, 2021).

Teacher Training & Professional Development:

The effective use of play-based approaches depends heavily on proper teacher training (Tobin, 2019). Urban schools, which have more frequent professional development opportunities, can implement dynamic, interactive teaching practices. In rural areas, access to such training is rarely provided, which often serves as a barrier to the application of innovative pedagogies (OECD, 2018).

Access to Materials and Infrastructure Support:

Urban schools tend to have more access to modern educational tools and safe spaces dedicated to play (World Bank, 2018). These resources help create play environments that incorporate both structured and unstructured play. In contrast, rural schools often lack sufficient infrastructure and teaching materials, which limits the benefits of play-based learning (Rahman et al., 2019).

The Cultural Dimension: Cultural Perceptions & Parental Attitudes

Different cultures hold varying opinions on what constitutes play, and therefore, what qualifies as play-based learning. However, in many rural communities, play is often regarded more as leisure rather than a powerful tool for teaching (Khan & Begum, 2021). These cultural attitudes may further hinder the adoption of play-based pedagogy, despite its proven advantages.

Policy & System Support:

System-level changes at both the national and local levels are essential for removing barriers to access and ensuring quality early childhood education for all children. Policy frameworks such as the Ministry of Education Bangladesh (2021) and international guidelines (UNESCO,

2021) emphasize the need for strengthened support and investments in teacher training, resource allocation, and infrastructural development, particularly in rural areas.

Play-based pedagogy can be effectively delivered when the contextual factors mentioned above support its implementation. This approach to teaching is much more interactive educators engage in guided play with children or scaffold learning which enhances not only academic learning but also crucial social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Fisher et al., 2013).

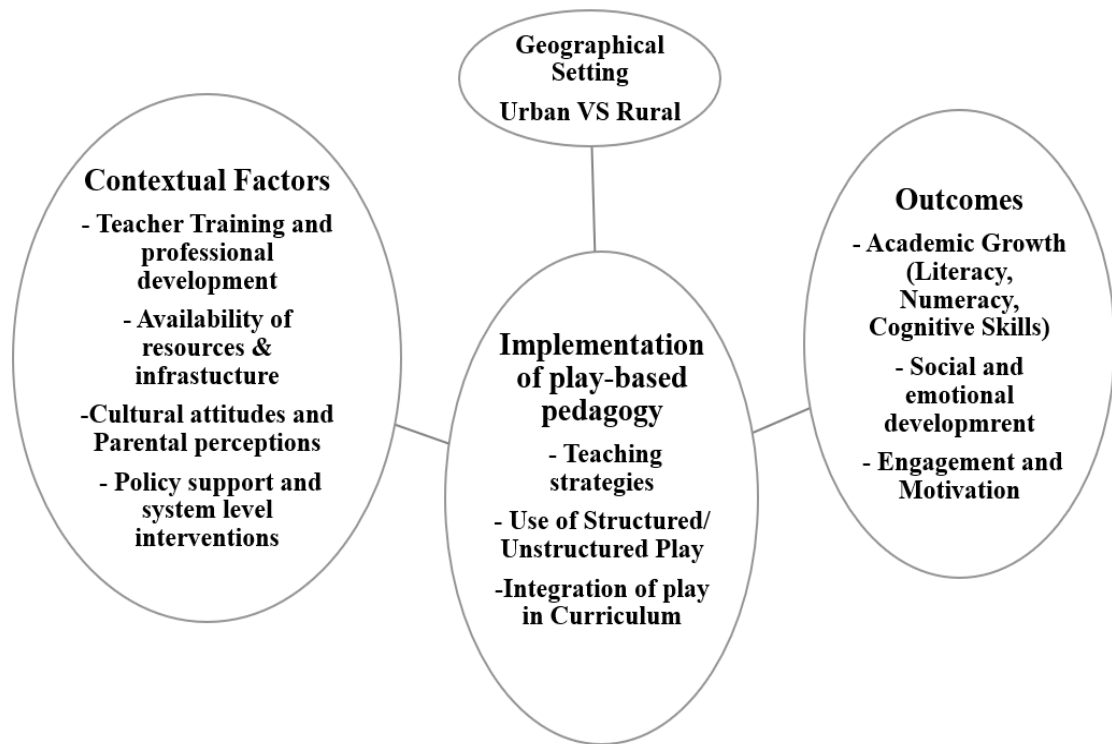
Teaching Strategies and Academic Outcomes for Students

Play-based learning is a proven approach to teaching that leads to better outcomes for students. Research indicates that these approaches can improve problem-solving skills, enhance language proficiency, and promote social development, setting the foundation for successful learning in school (Weisberg et al., 2016).

This conceptual framework highlights that the effective enactment of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary schools is influenced by interconnected contextual factors. Urban schools typically have an advantage over their rural counterparts in delivering effective teaching, as they offer better training, resources, and supportive policies, which contribute to better academic performance. While the limitations of play-based learning in developing countries are largely inherent in the rural environment such as inadequate infrastructure, limited national and local resources, and societal stigma around play the role of teachers in rural areas often receives less emphasis. This is partly due to the lack of a baseline from which to measure the effects of play-based learning practices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers and educators striving to achieve educational equity, as articulated in SDG 4 (United Nations, 2010).

Figure 1

The conceptual framework for the implementation of play-based pedagogy and its contextual factors and outcomes in urban to rural area of Bangladesh.



Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers, parents, and students regarding pre-primary education in both urban (Dhaka) and rural settings in Bangladesh. The qualitative approach was selected to facilitate an in-depth exploration of classroom dynamics, teaching strategies, parental perceptions, and student engagement within early childhood education. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it provides a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of the teachers, parents, and students in various settings (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative nature of this study reflects the research aim of exploring how play-based pedagogy is implemented within complex contexts and its role in the academic development of pre-primary learners. More specifically, the aim of the study is to understand the role that teaching practices in urban and rural schools play in the development of play-based learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Qualitative techniques offer a means to engage with the multifaceted, nuanced, and contextually interrelated aspects of play-based pedagogy. These practices, shaped by broader social structures, are embedded in the networks of schools, classrooms, and communities where teachers, parents, and learners interact, though their implications may differ across urban and rural contexts (O'Rourke & Waring, 2014). As play is a context-sensitive form of pedagogy, the environments where teachers work greatly influence their respective meanings and application of play, with considerable variation across urban and rural settings (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

This research takes a phenomenological approach, focusing on the participant-interactive nature of lived experiences in play-based pedagogy. It emphasizes understanding how urban and rural teachers make sense of their roles in implementing play-based learning, the challenges they face, and the insights they gain. Additionally, the study examines whether such pedagogies foster academic growth among pre-primary students (Creswell, 2014; van Manen, 2016). Focusing on lived experiences allows for a better understanding of how teachers and parents negotiate play-based learning in varied settings (Giorgi, 2009). The qualitative and phenomenological nature of this study allows the voices of the participants teachers, parents, and students to be heard, drawing attention to the practices of play-based pedagogy employed in both urban and rural contexts in Bangladesh. It provides a contextual and nuanced layer of understanding of play-based pedagogy, focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and strategies identified (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

3.2 Research Site

This study was conducted in three government pre-primary schools in Dhaka city and three in Brahmanbaria, both of which represent urban and rural settings, respectively.

These six schools were chosen to provide a comparative analysis of play-based pedagogy across different geographical contexts. It covers the pre-primary schools in Dhaka, which are urban- located while the pre-primary schools in Brahmanbaria represent a rural context, so it can provide a comparative framework for the study. The Dhaka schools are located in urban and semi-urban areas, in stark contrast to the rural context of the Brahmanbaria schools. The schools in both locations were purposefully selected based on a diverse representation of pre-primary education in two geographical contexts of Bangladesh key for understanding how play-based pedagogy is implemented and perceived with students' academic progress in both contexts. Similarities of Urban and Rural Schools:

The Particulars: Classroom Size and Facilities:

The size of the classrooms of both urban Dhaka schools and rural Brahmanbaria schools is relatively large. In Dhaka, classrooms are occupied by approximately 40-45 students, and rural schools are not too dissimilar in numbers, they struggle with overcrowding. Although multimedia materials (such as projector and laptop) are present in both the contexts, in urban of the context of Dhaka the proper utilization and access on multimedia instruments are better than the rural settings. Due to financial and lack of teacher training, rural settings where multimedia materials deployed are not used properly.

Socio-Economic Status of the Students:

One of the many similarities is the low socio – economic status of learners in urban and rural schools. In Dhaka, most of the children are from poor, urban households, and their parents work in the informal sector, including street vending, day labor and the garment industry. Likewise, in Brahmanbaria, many students hail from lower- and middle-income families, with parents working in farming, small businesses or the private sector.

Teacher Qualifications:

There are competent teachers in both urban and rural schools. In Dhaka teachers typically have a bachelor's degree or master's degree, and may, in addition, four have a B.Ed. degree. Likewise, in the rural Brahmanbaria area, teachers have university degrees and a small two have B.Ed. degrees. The years of teaching experience of teachers in each environment differ, but the teachers in both are required to use a teaching guide and method, therefore, allowing for some consistency between schools.

Dissimilarities between Urban and Rural Schools:

Technology Usage:

Pre-primary schools of Dhaka, have relatively better access of multimedia resources; like: projectors, laptops, and functional multimedia classrooms enabling interactive and modern teaching. Where there are laptops and projectors, they are either used infrequently, because their operators have not been trained, the quality the infrastructure is inadequate, or the teachers are reluctant to use them.

Socio-Economic Status and Learning Environment:

The limited resource access and facile teaching model available in Dhaka's urban schools avoid its remote counterparts. Rural schools in Brahmanbaria though serving basic lessons, but they have a lack of everything that makes them little out-fashioned or traditional teaching techniques. In these rural schools there is more rote learning, whereas in the urban schools, which have better furnished classrooms and technology, learning is usually more interactive.

❖ Pedagogical Approach:

In Dhaka at least, there is momentum for more up-to-date and stimulating teaching methods particularly in classrooms with multimedia and play-based learning sessions. In contrast, rural schools continue to maintain a greater emphasis on traditional approaches to learning and basic instructional practices, which focus on direct instruction rather than interactive or exploratory learning. The study demonstrates that despite urban and rural schools in Bangladesh having many similarities in regard to large classes, low socio-economic status of students, and well-qualified teachers, they differ in resources, technology use, and the learning context. The city-based schools in Dhaka are able to access more contemporary resources and pedagogy, whereas rural schools in Brahmanbaria are utilizing more

traditional techniques. It is important to make sense of these contrasts and similarities in order to assess how play-based education can be meaningfully incorporated within both settings.

3.3 Research Participants & Sampling Procedure

This qualitative study employed non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, to recruit participants based on their availability, accessibility, and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2014). The sampling procedure was conducted as outlined below:

Initially, I leveraged local contacts and prior experience to identify suitable government pre-primary schools in both Dhaka city and Brahmanbaria. After selecting the schools, I sought and obtained formal permission and approval from the respective school administrators to proceed with the study. These efforts involved clarifying the research goals, describing the methodologies, and discussing ethical considerations to ensure openness and access to research locations. I then collaborated with head teachers to help identify and recruit 12 teacher participants who were responsible for teaching pre-primary grades. These teachers were selected due to their experience with play-based pedagogy in the classroom. Convenience sampling was deemed appropriate for this study, as it allows for the recruitment of individuals who are readily available and accessible (Creswell, 2014).

However, this approach is not without limitations, such as a higher potential for self-selection bias and less utility in terms of generalizability. These limitations imply that the findings may only represent the views of a specific group of individuals and may not be generalizable to the broader population, which can limit the extent to which the study's conclusions can be applied more widely. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of play-based pedagogy, parents were also included in the study to provide a broader

perspective on how pre-primary students achieve academic growth in both urban and rural settings in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, 24 parents from the selected schools were recruited to participate in focus group discussions (FGD) to explore their understanding of and support for play-based pedagogy at home. Convenience sampling was appropriate in this case as well, as it allowed for the inclusion of individuals who were willing and easy to reach (Creswell, 2014). As with the teacher sample, the limitations of this approach such as the higher potential for self-selection bias and limited generalizability applied here as well. The findings may only reflect the views of specific participants and may not be broadly applicable.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Interviews were conducted with teachers in the study's pre-primary schools, providing valuable insights into the role of school leaders in the development and implementation of play-based learning. However, similar to the sampling technique, this interviewing approach has its limitations. The findings are based on the views of a small group, so they may not fully represent the perspectives of all stakeholders.

Semi-structured interviews, which have a fixed set of open-ended questions, were conducted. However, the interviewer could ask follow-up questions depending on the participant's responses (Kallio et al., 2016). These interviews followed an interview schedule that covered topics such as the strategies schools were using to implement play-based pedagogy, the support and resources provided to teachers, and their observations and experiences of the challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption and delivery of these practices.

Both FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) and semi-structured interviews were conducted in person, allowing for increased interaction and rapport with participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the sessions were audio-recorded to maintain ethical

standards and ensure accurate data collection. The recordings were subsequently transcribed and analyzed. The discussion guide was the primary instrument used for the FGDs, containing a list of open-ended questions addressing themes related to the importance of play in early learning. The aim of the focus group discussions was to stimulate group conversation, encourage sharing of different perspectives, and promote reflection on shared experiences. By employing both FGDs and semi-structured interviews as complementary data collection strategies, the study adhered to its phenomenological design and qualitative research nature.

Additionally, I observed both urban and rural pre-primary classrooms, focusing on how young learners interacted with the classroom environment, particularly through play-based teaching.

3.5 Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative research investigation, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Positioned as an insider, with prior teaching experience in one of the selected primary schools, the researcher brings an in-depth understanding of the neighborhood and context, which is crucial in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, insider research also introduces limitations, such as potential bias and challenges to objectivity, which must be acknowledged and addressed throughout the research process (Anderson, 2006). Charmaz (2014) emphasizes the importance of establishing strong rapport and trust with participants to promote openness and honesty in focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews (SSIs), which are fundamental for effective qualitative data collection. Moreover, through alternative methods of listening and observation, the researcher gains nonverbal cues and insights into group dynamics, deepening their understanding of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Ethical

considerations underpin the study, following established principles of qualitative research quality (Creswell, 2013). Ensuring secure and controlled access to data protects both its integrity and prevents misuse, which is essential for upholding research credibility (Silverman, 2016). The researcher strives to preserve the participants' voices and perspectives, maintaining reflexivity in the simultaneous process of data analysis and report writing, particularly in the context of urban and rural pre-primary education in Bangladesh. Past experiences with the schools were pivotal in fostering trust, a key element of insider research, as noted by Heath et al. (2009), and maintaining professionalism. Ethical considerations were also central in ensuring a transparent and respectful approach to the research process (Glesne, 2016). Reflexive notes were meticulously recorded, and discussions with a supervisor were conducted to identify potential biases, thereby enhancing the study's trustworthiness (Finlay, 2002). This highlights the crucial role of the researcher in presenting findings that are not only ethical but also responsible.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data confirmed an inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful approach to qualitative research which facilitates awareness of major themes from the results. The initial step of analysis was the immersion in the data through multiple readings of the interview transcripts and FGDs transcripts with teachers and parents to enable a full understanding of the data contents. This phase included noting patterns and recurring initial thoughts and ideas. To include descriptive and interpretative codes to identify text segments containing relevant ideas, concepts, or themes in relation to play-based learning and formative assessment. Group codes were then coded into clusters of codes, in which the group codes were used to actively look for repetitions or ideas that pertained to the research questions of the study. The researcher checked if the coded extracts and the whole dataset were adequately represented

by examining if the potential themes fit consistently with the extracts and were indeed unique from other themes. The sub themes developed were then designated with a title that clearly described the major theme and the data it represented. These themes were then continuously refined and developed until they were able to adequately reflect key aspects of the study. Drawing on illustrative and representative quotes from the FGDs and semi-structured interviews, the researcher developed an analytic narrative that interconnected the data into a compelling and cohesive story. This enabled the themes to be clearly articulated and supported the findings of the study.

3.7 Ethical Issues and Concerns

I used the research questions to sort of structure how I discussed the findings, and then also the main themes for me helped to link what I found to what other studies have said. I remained reflexive throughout the thematic analysis process, regularly considering my own perspectives and attempting to be mindful of any personal prejudices which might influence my interpretations of the data. To ensure the findings were credible, I employed peer debriefing and member checking. Peer debriefing, I presented my themes and working ideas to other colleagues who were not part of the study. Their advice opened my eyes to another way of looking at things. To ensure trustworthiness, I returned to some participants for member-checking as to whether the themes I generated resonated with what respondents intended to convey during the interviews and focus group discussions. Their comments helped reassure me that my interpretation was on the mark. Ethical principles play a vital role in research involving human subjects. The ethical considerations formed the central tenet of this study in order to shield the participant and enhance the trustworthiness of the research process. Before starting the study, I gave all participants (teachers and parents) an informed consent form. I clearly explained the purpose of the study, what they would be asked to do, and any possible risks or benefits. I also told them they could leave the study at any time

without any problem or punishment. Taking part was completely up to them, and no one was forced or pressured to join. These steps follow common research rules that protect participants' rights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; BERA, 2018). To keep their information private, I used fake names (pseudonyms), kept all data safely stored, and made sure only I could access the original information. This helped make sure their privacy and trust were respected throughout the study.

Data treatment was kept private and anonymous. Participants were referred to by pseudonyms or codes to preserve their identities. The data were kept securely, and access to personally identifiable information was limited. All steps were taken to ensure that data collected would be treated in accordance with relevant regulations and guidelines. This had to include proper processes for securely storing and eventually disposing of that data to avoid unauthorized access or misuse. The researcher was dedicated to protecting the confidentiality of every single participant, emphasizing that all identifying information would be held in strict confidence and the data will be used strictly for the purpose of the study. By adhering to ethical guidelines throughout the research process, the study was carried out in an ethical manner, with due consideration given to the participants whose experiences and insights informed the analysis.

3.8 Credibility and Rigor

My background as an educator, having worked as a teacher for 12 years, enabled me to access firsthand knowledge and insights into the classroom contexts and practices being investigated. Drawing from this experience informed my rapport with participants, nuanced understanding of their experiences, and questions I developed for data collection.

Additionally, during my M.Ed. studies, as I was immersed in intensive coursework on research methodology and gained skills to design, implement, and analyze a qualitative study

in an organized fashion. This included qualitative data collection methods, including interview and focus groups, as well as approaches to data coding and analyzing. I was also trained on ethical guidelines that guided me during the study. To prepare for this study, I went through an iterative cycle, beginning with a literature review that sought to identify gaps and redesign questions. I developed a research matrix which purely articulated subsection of the project: its purpose, research objectives and sources of information while underscoring how I would go about collecting and analyzing the information. This matrix became a roadmap, leading me through my research process. Furthermore, I created research proposal that was thoroughly evaluated by my supervisor and signed off and only then did I move to data collection.

In terms of personal qualities, I knew that I needed to be self-aware, reflective and open-minded in my research process. I also maintained a reflective journal to help bracket my preconceptions and surface potential biases. Even with prior experience as a teacher, allowing myself an 'insider's' perspective, I was determined not to let assumptions, however unconscious I hoped they would be, influence my perspectives on the data. During the interviews and focus group discussions, I also made sure to be patient, present, and accessible to help create an environment of openness and honesty, where participants could share their perspectives freely. The trustworthiness and credibility of this qualitative research aims at listening to primary teachers' voices concerning play-based pedagogy were confirmed by the academic staff's affiliation, sound methodological training, extensive preparation, and reflexive and ethical attitude. To triangulate the results, I also conducted FGDs and semi-structured interviews with two different groups of key informants: teachers and parents. This allowed me to gather the true, first-hand wisdom from those working in the field of early childhood education. Being able to listen to both is believed to have contributed to the credibility of the data and the depth of insight obtained.

3.9 Limitations of the study

This study, while aiming for a robust and credible qualitative inquiry, has some inherent limitations. Classroom observations, initially part of the research design along with teacher interviews and focus groups, were not possible due to time constraints. As it was the start of the school year, children were still adjusting to the new environment, with some needing special attention. They had not yet started subject-based classes or established play-based lessons, making it difficult to observe the typical enactment of play-based pedagogy.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings derived from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents. Qualitative data were analyzed and categorized into themes based on emerging patterns. This research investigates the perceptions, classroom practices, supports, and challenges associated with the implementation of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary classrooms in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. For validity, data triangulation was used by comparing findings from the interview guides, FGDs, and observation notes. The results are reported thematically in terms of four themes and several sub-themes that overall provide insight into the salient aspects of stakeholders' experiences of and perspectives on play-based learning in public pre-primary education. For participant privacy protection and clarity, I did not mention or use any participants' name.

Table 4.1

Themes and Sub-themes

Theme 1- Teachers' and Parents perception of play-based pedagogy in Urban and rural govt. pre-primary	Theme 2- Classroom practice in urban and rural (pre-primary) through play-based pedagogy	Theme 3- Support while implementing play-based pedagogy	Theme 4- Challenges of implementing play-based pedagogy in urban and rural pre-primary of Bangladesh
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school of Bangladesh			
▪ Play as a Medium of Learning is Highly Recognizable ▪ Classroom become Engaged Through a Play-Based Curriculum. • Effective approaches to learning any subject/ topic.	▪ Integration of Play into regular classroom Instruction ▪ Classroom environment ▪ Students' engagement and participation ▪ Students' ownership ▪ Assessment and monitoring	▪ Teaching materials and Teaching Resources by Government ▪ Role of Local Education Officers ▪ Support from Peer Teachers ▪ Parental Support and Their Perceptions ▪ Classroom Management and Parental Involvement	▪ Lack of training and follow up ▪ Resources and funding ▪ Administrative duties ▪ Teacher shortage Misconception of parents and assessment expectations.

4.2 Teachers' and Parents perception of play-based pedagogy in Urban and rural govt. pre-primary school of Bangladesh

This theme examines the attitudes of teachers and parents towards play-based pedagogy in government-run pre-primary schools in both urban and rural Bangladesh. More specifically, it discusses how the teachers' knowledge and beliefs are developed after their involvement in a 15-day long in-service training program on play-based learning. The focus was on the degree to which this educational program has affected teachers' perceptions regarding the role and usefulness of play in early childhood. It also explores the parent's knowledge and embracement of play based pedagogy, with a focus on the urban and rural disparity. I organized the three sub themes as *Play as a Medium of Learning is Highly Recognizable, Classroom become Engaged Through a Play-Based Curriculum, Way to learn any subject/topic.*

4.2.1 Play as a Medium of Learning is Highly Recognizable

This sub-theme demonstrates the unanimous agreement among teachers and parents that play is an important and effective way for young children to learn. Play is typically understood not only to serve as an educational platform, but as a form of pleasure, emotional satisfaction and self-expression for little ones. A rural pre-primary teacher expressed, *'It is difficult to put into words! Play-based curricula significantly contribute to the physical, mental, and intellectual development of children in all aspects.'* (Interview#6,06-02-25)

According all interview participants play is the best medium of teaching and learning. One of the teachers shared her experience while teaching in the classroom,

‘The impact of play-based learning for example, playing with boats or making shapes helps children understand math and learn numbers. Games with letters help them learn Bengali alphabets. Games with colors help them know color names. There are many other games that keep children interested and help them to learn.’ (Interview#1, 29-01-25)

Parents, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas, commonly agree that children are happier, more enthusiastic about attending school, and more engaged in daily activities when learning through play.

‘Kids are eager to come to school and happily shares what they do in class every day. Whenever they see anything lying around at home, they start singing the ‘clean-up’ song. We really enjoy it.’ (Focus group#1, 30-01-25)

Play as a powerful pedagogical tool is an affirmation of the possibility of an organic learning environment in which both intellectual as well emotional growth will take place.

4.2.2 Classroom become Engaged Through a Play-Based Curriculum

This sub-theme examines the extent and quality of student engagement evident in play-based learning within pre-primary classrooms. In urban and rural settings, play-based teaching has been found to result in high levels of student involvement, motivation, and interaction. Children are more attentive, motivated and participative when play is meaningfully incorporated into the classroom. Such activities as storytelling, fiction playing, playing games, and tangible manipulation draw children’s attention and ensure that learning is fun and approachable.

‘Some games also help improve their thinking skills. For example. The game ‘Birds fly’- in this game, children learn to tell the difference between animals and birds through fun activities.’ (Interview#2,30-01-25)

Play-based methods also result in students being less distracted and more cooperative than other teaching methods, according to teachers. In the classroom with well-trained teachers, students are not just playing, they are learning critical skill-sets like persuasion, critical-thinking and cooperation. Students are coming to school with full of enthusiasm.

One teacher commented-

'In my class I have 33 students and average 29 are coming regularly. Within a short time, they used to come to school and they want to learn.' (Interview#3, 09-02-25)

4.2.3 Effective approaches to learning Any Subject/Topic

This sub-theme suggests that the value of play is not just for pleasure, but also pedagogical. Attendees explain how children are more receptive to and have greater recall of information when it is embedded in gaming, story, song, or tactile activity.

'Bangla, math, shapes, colors, manners, cleanliness as well they can learn through play.'

(Interview#4, 04-02-25)

Parents notice that children can remember what they learned through play much more effectively than rote learning. Playing is just seen as a natural continuation of a child's curiosity and focus on something, where they try things out conceptually because it's fun and they're interested! One parent from FGD#2 mentioned,

'Initially, I feel the way of teaching was hard. But now from television and you tube getting much more clear ideas and understand this is easiest way to learn. Math, Bangla and other subjects they learn through different songs and actions.' (Focus group#2, 30-01-25)

Teachers point to examples like counting by using blocks or learning the alphabet through songs; by using different resources makes learning more fun and help the students to

remember and use what they learn more easily. Play diminishes fear and generates joy in learning which in turn enhances motivation.

According one of the rural teachers-

‘Students of rural primary are very active. They are good at physical education, sports, both in music and dance’. (Interview#6, 06-02-25) Again she added,

‘When students learn through real life example, that they can remember easily.’

(Interview#6, 06-02-25)

It is easier for students to understand and remember what they are learning when actual practice plays a role in instruction. That’s because they are able to relate what they are learning to things they already see or experience in their day-to-day lives. For instance, learning money using real coins or notes helps students more effectively memorize how money is counted and how it is used, than reading about it in a book. Moral of the story examples are so helpful to teachers and students who look for real examples they can relate to.

4.3 Classroom practice in urban and rural (pre-primary) through play-based pedagogy

Through classroom observations, I explored the integration of play-based learning into teaching. Teachers consistently incorporate play into daily lessons, creating an interactive curriculum that encourages student participation. Teachers have been using guides with them for all their materials. Student engagement and involvement are observed as pivotal measures of effective play-based learning as children show enthusiasm, curiosity and good communication skills when learning experiences are playful and hands on. In rural pre-primary schools, students also actively participate in various play-based activities, such as

during circle time, the 'Birds Fly' game, and the 'Piece of Paper' song activity, which were observed during the classroom visits. Fly of the Birds game (Pakhi Ure Khela).

Objective: To enhance children's listening and attention, as well as their understanding of various animals and verbs.

Materials Needed:

No materials are necessary — just the open space.

How to Play:

The teacher calls out the name of an animal or object to the class. If the teacher says “Birds fly,” students must flap their arms to indicate flying. If the teacher names something that doesn’t fly (like “dog” or “table”), the students should not move whatsoever. If a student shifts when they should not, they are gently reminded to pay better attention. The teacher calls out more animals and objects (crow, butterfly, cow, airplane, pencil, etc.).

Learning Outcome:

Kids are learning to name animals and things.

They practice focusing and listening.

They build physical coordination and the ability to think fast.

Tukro Kagoz Moyla Activity (Torn Paper Mess Song)

Objective:

To create awareness on cleanliness and to instigate group activity as well as creativity.

Materials Needed:

scraps of paper (colored, or from a newspaper)

Basket/basket to put paper in

Space to move around and sing

How to Do the Activity:

The teacher sings a cheerful song, “Tukro Kagoz Moyla,” and the children are encouraged to join in. Singing, the children pretend they are clearing up the classroom, picking up some ripped paper “moyla” (mess) and putting it into a bin.

The teacher can make a fun beat by clapping or playing a simple instrument, such as a tambourine.

At the end of the song, the children talk about why it is important to keep their classroom clean.

Learning Outcome:

Children already know the importance of cleanliness.

They learn to work together and listen.

Fun is cleaning together with music, they say.

I have discussed under the main theme these sub themes as - *teaching materials and teaching resources by government, Role of Local Education Officers, Support from Peer Teachers, Parental Support and Their Perceptions, Classroom Management and Parental Involvement.*

4.3.1 Teaching materials and Teaching Resources by Government

During observation in urban pre-primary school, I found all six schools have sufficient teaching materials. There are four different corners had different types of clay, plastic and handmade toys to play with. There are different number, alphabet blocks, beads, pictures, puzzles, in block corner. In the art and book corner- crayons, color pencils, and color books were found. In the other, the imagination corner was organized by different utensils, doctor set, cooking set, clay animals, fruits and handmade dolls. Moreover, in the sand water corner, students get chance to play with water, measuring plastic cups, sand, rice, dal, funnel, spoons, and bowls. When I observed the conditions of urban pre-primary schools, I discovered that all six schools had adequate teaching and learning materials. Every classroom was beautifully arranged with four play corners, each with an array of materials to promote development in the early years. The aim was to make learning fun, hands-on and interactive for the kids. For instance, children were observed sorting alphabet blocks, stacking number cubes to make a tower, or playing with toy dishes and pretending to cook meals, or pouring sand through a funnel using measuring cups. Now that we have been introduced to the four corners, let us examine them one by one:

❖ Block Corner

This was the area of countless educational toys such as:

- **Number and alphabet blocks**

Counters and Beaders of Beautiful Beads Colorful counting beads for a range of math activities and weaving beads onto string or attaching to pipe cleaners for threading.

▪ **Picture cards**

Shape, animal or letter matching puzzles

Children utilized these items to enhance their mathematic and hand-eye coordination skills, as well as their problem solving abilities.

❖ **Art and Book Corner**

Here in this adjacent corner, expression was facilitated with Imaginations at Play mixed materials such as:

Crayons and color pencils

Sketch pads and coloring books

Picture books with simple words

They thrived by drawing, coloring, flipping through picture books that contributed to early literacy and creativity.

❖ **Imagination Corner**

This area was set up with some objects to use for imaginative play and storytelling including:

Toy utensils and cooking sets

Doctor kits and models of clay animals and fruits

Dolls and tiny furniture

Children played by pretending to be doctors or cooks or shopkeepers, stimulating their imaginations and social skills.

❖ Sand and Water Corner

Here, sensory play was opened up via materials such as:

Sand, rice, and lentils (dal)

Tubs of water with plastic cups, funnels, spoons and bowls

Children poured, measured and mixed, which helped them develop fine motor skills and early science concepts like volume and texture.

In urban school students get projectors sound system and laptop facilities. Teachers are also having good IT knowledge. But in rural area are deprived having big screen or IT expert teachers. But one teacher explained their situation,

'We did have a laptop, but it's currently out of order. If there is a special program, the school hires a projector. There are also unique opportunities in the village, though there are many issues here as well. We use our spacious field, various kinds of seeds, beads and nature to aid our learning.' (Interview#4, 04.02.25)

Teachers shared how they fortunate to have a nice sound system and a big screen at their school. These activities provide an enhancement in the classroom for the children. Once in a while, the day begins with the sound system blaring the children's favorite rhymes. The large screen plays colorful animations or videos that correspond with the songs, offering a more interesting and engaging learning experience.

At other times, soft, musical background music is played as the children enter the classroom. This can help to set a calm and happy mood, making sure the students feel ready to learn. Their listening skills are also developed by the music and it provides a calm start to the day. These little things add up to make learning joyful and child centered.

Another teacher from rural school mentioned,

'We have good quality sound system and big screen. Sometimes students started their regular class with their favorite rhymes, sometimes with soft melodious background music.'
(Interview#1, 29.01.25)

All of the teachers shared about how teaching guide help them to design their classroom properly. Both in urban and rural teachers designing their classes in a similar way by following teaching guide. One teacher mentioned-

'Actually, we have enriched teaching guide. In that guide we found several instructions which is aligned with the students. We get concepts from it. Based on it, we got different games like, play, birds' fly, who will be my friend, piece of paper, games of letters, Mirror and so on.'
(Interview#1, 29-01-25)

4.3.2 Role of Local Education Officers

Local education officers play a pivotal role in supervising and supporting schools. Their involvement in monitoring and providing guidance helps maintain the quality of play-based pedagogy.

- **Monitoring School Activities:**

They go to schools on routine basis to watch some classes work and whether the play-based learning is being executed. They evaluate the utilization of learning resources, student involvement, and the learning environment itself.

- **Professional Advisement:**

They provide immediate advice to teachers on how to enhance their lesson planning, classroom arrangement, and use of learning corners. They also run training and workshops for teachers to improve their abilities to teach in the child-centered, play-based way.

- **Supporting Materials:**

Local education officers support schools to obtain fundamental play-based materials, for example puzzles, blocks, storybooks and art materials. And in some cases, they assist in organizing resources from government or donor projects.

❖ **The Promotion of Involvement in the Community:**

They encourage school management committees and parents to get involved in early learning by recognizing the educational importance of play. They help build bridges between schools and the community.

▪ **Tracking Progress:**

They gather information on children's development and learning outcomes to track the success of the play-based approach. And from what they find they report to higher authorities and offer suggestions.

4.3.3 Support from Peer Teachers

Collaboration among pre-primary teachers creates a supportive environment for sharing ideas and solving challenges related to play-based teaching. Peer support encourages innovation, motivation, and collective problem-solving, which are vital for sustaining pedagogical practices, especially where formal support is limited. When classroom teachers are busy with different official work that time head teacher or other grade level teachers used to take their classes. For that reason, each of them had to do the 15 days play-based workshop.

'When I am busy with other administrative work, my headmistress of grade 1 and 2 teachers comes to help my class.' (Interview#4, 04-02-25)

4.3.4 Parental Support and Their Perceptions

In urban area parents are more conscious than rural parents. But gradually rural parents understand that play-based learning is more sustainable. One of the rural teachers mentioned-

'There are different mentalities among parents. They don't understand the curriculum, but gradually they go through the process.' (Interview#4, 04-02-25)

Another rural parent commented-

‘Although ours is a village school, it is well-maintained and the teachers are attentive. In the beginning, when the children cry, we stay with, putting aside all other tasks.’ (Focus group#3, 05-02-25)

One of the rural parents commented-

‘Initially, it was very difficult to understand. Gradually, we are starting to get the idea. We watch on TV and YouTube. This way of learning is easier for them. They learn math and Bengali through songs.’ (Focus group#2, 30-01-25)

In FGD there are many parents shared their perception regarding play. One of the Urban parents mentioned,

‘As far I know about play-based learning, rhymes, poem or song everything kids learn through play’. (Focus group#3, 09-02-25)

Another parent added-

‘My son does not stay at home. There are a big field, well decorated classroom. He wants to stay at school and play. In these days he learned lots of rhymes.’ (Focus group#4, 06-02-25)

In rural pre-primary school parents are satisfied whatever they have. One parent mentioned,

‘There is a kindergarten beside my area but I prefer this school. I think learning scope and place both are available here. Moreover, teachers are expert’ (Focus group#4, 06-02-25)

4.3.5 Classroom Management and Parental Involvement

Parents are also doing a good job of backing teachers up, and being supportive, and that aids in classroom discipline. That support can be in several forms:

- **Regular Communication:**

Teachers consistently interfaced with parents in person, over the telephone or through notes.

Parents receive information about their child's behavior, progress, and needs, which enables them to remain involved and provide support from home.

- **Voluntary Participation in Class Work:**

Some of the parents come to help on special occasions, during festivals or learning activity days. Their presence helps keep everyone in check and gives kids extra attention during group work, or play.

- **Sending Learning Materials:**

Local basic educations in many cases rely on parents to supply necessities, like pencils, a drawing book, old newspapers and natural materials (seeds, leaves), which teachers need for work in class.

- **Reinforce at home:**

When parents support the rules and routines of the classroom at home (e.g., respect, taking turns or listening), children's behavior in the classroom is better. The collaboration of home and school help the teacher to maintain control in the classroom.

- **Participating in School Meetings:**

Parents come to the parent-teacher meeting, listen to feedback and actively engage in a discussion of what they can do to help their child and the school. Their participation demonstrates that learning is valued and encourages adherence to rules. Teachers are getting enough support from parents to manage their classroom.

- **In-Class Parent Support:**

And some parents offered to remain in the classroom, particularly during the initial weeks.

When children were cranky, crying or refusing to go to school, their presence was very helpful.

These children felt better and more secure with their parents around. They adjusted to school faster because the parents were around.

- **Choosing a Class Captain:**

As the students began to settle in, the class would eventually vote and elect a class captain.

The captain was typically a responsible, personable student who could take charge of small jobs and help keep things organized. Students paid attention when their class captain spoke and could follow simple commands, such as lining up or being quiet or gathering materials.

- **Training Student Responsibility:**

It had a class captain and students taught leadership. It also fostered camaraderie and discipline, as students took more responsibility for classroom rules and routines.

One of the teachers from urban school mentioned,

'In the past, we used to spend about 2-3 months helping students feel comfortable in the classroom at the start of the school year. A number of useful tactics were used during this time to facilitate this transition as smoothly as possible.' (Interview#3, 09-02-25)

4.4 Challenges of implementing play-based pedagogy in urban and rural pre-primary of Bangladesh

According to teachers' interview guide, FGD and classroom observation, it is found that there are many challenges to actualizing play-based pedagogy in urban and rural pre-primary schools in Bangladesh. I have analyzed and finalized six sub themes under the main theme- *lack of training and follow-up, resources and funding, administrative duties, teacher shortage, misconceptions of parents and assessment expectations.*

4.4.1 Lack of Training and Follow-Up

One of the primary challenges identified by teachers in both urban and rural settings is the insufficient training on play-based pedagogy. Many educators receive limited initial instruction and minimal ongoing support or supervision, which affects their confidence and ability to effectively apply play-based methods in the classroom. The absence of continuous follow-up and refresher training hampers the consistent quality of teaching practices. Both urban and rural teachers have a desire to upgrade themselves in a better way. They held B.Ed. and M.Ed. degrees, had completed PTI training, and received 15 days of training in play-based learning. But once they get 15-day workshop, but there is no follow-up.

One urban teacher commented-

'It is mentionable that, we used to PTI, 15 days play-based learning training but we don't have any follow-up. The responsible one who come to visit my class had no idea what I can do? On the other hand. Who knows me better never visit my class or school.'

(Interview#1, 29-01-25)

4.4.2 Resources and Funding

A significant barrier to implementing play-based learning is the scarcity of adequate resources and financial support. Rural schools, in particular, struggle with limited availability of play materials, equipment of modern technology like sound system, projector, computer or laptop. Even in urban areas, budget constraints often restrict the acquisition of innovative learning tools, impacting the diversity and quality of play activities. In rural school according govt. there should be IT facilities but most of the schools they don't have their own laptop or multi-media. One teacher mentioned-

‘Funds are allocated, but we do not receive them.’ (Interview#4, 04-02-25 and Interview#6, 06-02-25)

All the teacher wanted to get the updated version of teaching guide. One teacher commented-

‘I think, if possible, every year or alternate year our teaching guide could be updated with slight modifications or addition. Knowledge has no limitations. NCTB is doing a great job.’ (Interview#1, 29-01-25)

In govt. pre-primary curriculum there are two books “Amar Boi” and “Esho likhte shikha.”

“Amar Boi” (My Book)

❖ General Content & Structure

The book contains 13 thematic chapters, specially made for pre-school-aged children. It’s designed with bright images and simple Bangla text, making it easy and fun to follow.

❖ Key Themes Covered

National Anthem – Introduces children to “*Amar Shonar Bangla*”.

Self-Introduction – Learning to say their name, family, school, and address.

Art & Creativity – Pages for drawing, coloring, and spotting objects.

Environment – Identifying and talking about elements like trees, animals, fruits, weather, and seasons.

Alphabet Exposure – Early familiarity with **Bengali letters**—showing the letter, a matching picture, and a word (e.g., “ক – কলম”).

Rhymes & Poems – Simple verses like:

“ভোর হলো, দোর খোল”

“ল, শ গোল দাগ দেই”

These help with rhythmic speaking and letter recognition.

- **Interactive Activities**

Matching games (e.g., match picture to word). Completing partial illustrations to encourage observation skills. Activities are focused on speaking, listening, drawing and early literacy skills.

- **Visual & Didactic Tools**

Colorful pictures accompany every lesson to grab children’s attention and aid vocabulary building. The book aligns with Bangla alphabet charts and other classroom visuals from the same curriculum.

"Esho Likhte Shikhi" (Let’s Learn to Write)

This book is part of Bangladesh’s pre-primary curriculum and focuses on developing early writing skills in young children. Here's what's typically included:

- **Personal Information Practice:**

Children learn to write their own name, school name, and class roll number. These are presented in large letters with space for tracing and practice.

- **Bengali Alphabet Practice:**

Exercises to write vowels (স্বরবর্ণ) and consonants (ব্যঞ্জনবর্ণ).

Simple word writing using familiar objects or names to make practice engaging.

Tracing and freehand writing activities are provided to build fine motor skills.

❖ **Visual Learning Tools (Used Alongside the Book):**

- **Flash Cards:** Featuring letters and words to help with visual recognition.
- **Flip Charts:** Large charts showing letters and example words for group learning.
- **Alphabet Charts:** Vowel and consonant charts for classroom display and learning support.

❖ **Storybooks (Part of the Pre-Primary Package):**

Supplementary picture books and simple storybooks are included, such as:

Ting Tonker Golpo (Story of Ting Tonk)

Lal Pokar Golpo (The Story of the Red Insect)

Opor Biral (Apu's Cat)

Borgo Raja O Tribhuj Rani (King of Letters and Triangle Queen)

On the other side one of the teachers from rural pre-primary commented about students' books,

"I think if we get individual English book, it would be easy to guide our students thoroughly."

(Interview#6, 06-02-25)

❖ **Why Teachers Are Requesting Individual English Books:**

▪ **Early Language Exposure**

Children in government pre-primary schools are already surrounded by Bangla materials, but there is little structured exposure to English words or letters. Introducing individual English books helps build basic vocabulary, such as names of animals, colors, fruits, body parts, etc.

▪ **Preparation for Primary Grades**

From Grade 1, English becomes a formal subject. Having an English book in pre-primary helps bridge that gap, making the transition smoother and reducing fear or difficulty when formal English learning begins.

▪ **Support for Teachers**

Without a standard English book, teachers have to collect or prepare English materials themselves, which is time-consuming. An individual English book ensures that every student has consistent content to follow, and teachers can plan lessons more effectively.

▪ **Inclusive Learning Materials**

Books with pictures and simple English words help all students, especially those who do not get any English exposure at home. It ensures equal learning opportunity across urban and rural students.

▪ **Encouraging Pronunciation & Listening**

With visual English content, teachers can use phonics-based teaching, and even integrate audio support or rhymes. This develops students' listening and speaking skills early on.

▪ Interest & Engagement

Children are naturally curious about new languages. A colorful English book can attract their attention and make learning fun and playful.

'In pre-primary students got less scope to learn English. I think students get benefitted if they get individual book for English. Because, in grade one they have English writing which is big jump for them.' (Interview#6, 06-02-25)

While technology can enhance interactive learning, its integration into play-based pedagogy remains minimal, especially in rural pre-primary schools. Challenges include lack of equipment, unreliable electricity, and limited teacher training on educational technologies, which collectively limit opportunities to incorporate digital play-based learning tools. One teacher mentioned from rural school-

'Whole school we have one IT expert teacher. We need more IT workshops.' (Interview#4, 04-02-25)

4.4.3 Administrative Duties

Teachers frequently report those administrative responsibilities, such as record-keeping and compliance with bureaucratic tasks, consume a substantial portion of their time and energy.

One of the teachers added-

'Honestly speaking, I want to add regarding my responsibility. Every year I started new academic year enthusiastically. But outside of my classroom I have to do so many things. Most of the people are unaware about that. Like stipend update, new stipend entries, deworming and recording, measuring weight, vision testing and making lists, child survey, home visits, and creating unique online ID cards for all the

children. For this reason, I could not concentrate in my work. I feel exhausted.'

(Interview#1, 29-01-25)

Homeroom teachers' general presence in the classroom was specifically noted by parents in FGD#1 (Focus Group Discussion 1). This highlights how important and noticeable the teacher's role is in early childhood education.

▪ **What Parents Noticed and Meant**

Consistency of Care and Teaching:

Parents liked having the same classroom teacher every day. This caused such a sense of trust between the kids and the teacher and it made the classroom feel so safe and solid.

▪ **Positive Impact on Children:**

Kids felt more at home and more secure knowing that a friend was always there. This was calming, particularly for younger or first-time attender of schools.

▪ **Better communication with the families:**

More frequent presence of teachers ensured effective contact between home and school.

Parents could easily express concerns, receive feedback and learn more about their child's progress in learning Better Classroom Management. Children who have A reliable teacher knows What works for each student What makes each student tick What they can safely ignore in politics, as everywhere else, knowledge is power and they have the knowledge. This facilitated management of classroom procedures, instructional activities, and emotional support provided by teachers. Even in FGD#1 parents mentioned about regular presence of classroom teachers.

'We found it challenging last year, when homeroom teacher was unavailable in the class due to extra duties. Most of the time, headmistress or other homeroom teachers took the class. This year we don't want to see the same situation. It affects our children badly. We can understand there is nothing to do from teachers' side. We seek govt. help on this respect. They should give non-teaching duties to someone else.'
(Focus group#1, 29-01-25)

Another teacher from urban school added-

'While children do make progress, whenever we are away from school for other duties, they come to school crying and don't want to return the next day.'
(Interview#2, 30-01-25)

4.4.4 Teacher Shortage

Pre-primary schools in both urban and rural areas face shortages of qualified teachers, leading to larger class sizes and reduced individual attention for students. This gap makes it challenging to manage active, play-centered classrooms effectively, often forcing teachers to rely on more traditional, didactic teaching methods. From teachers' interview guide most of the teacher mentioned about teacher shortage in pre-primary classroom. One of the teachers from rural school and urban school mentioned that-

'Some schools have their co-teacher or teacher assistant who is not approved by the govt. She only assists the teacher in the classroom. In many schools, the school authority gives 15 days of training to teachers of other classes so that they can provide support to the homeroom teacher.' (Interview#1, 29-01-25 and Interview#4, 04-02-25)

4.4.5 Misconceptions of Parents and Assessment Expectations

Some parents, particularly in rural communities, hold misconceptions about play being less serious or effective than formal academic instruction. Moreover, teachers are constantly under pressure to concentrate on test scores and academic numbers, and therefore, they often prefer rote learning over play-based approaches. This constrains the extent to which they can provide lesson activities which are child-friendly and activity-based.

One of the teachers from rural school commented-

'We have some pressure from the parents. They want us to make the children do more writing. So, unofficially, we have to do it.' (Interview#6, 06-02-25)

Though in pre-primary level students learn through play but reality is different in some schools. Whenever Teachers shared their challenges, they talk about parental pressure of rote learning and copy writing. One teacher mentioned-

'In my class, not all parents have the same mindset. I face some challenges because of that.' (Interview#2, 30-01-25)

Another teacher added-

'Parents who prefer rote learning often take time to accept the idea of learning through play.' (Interview#6, 06-02-25)

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study and provides a summary of the research findings to address the research questions. The chapter presents the main lessons from findings of the perception of Bangladeshi government pre-primary schools, urban and rural. It specifically explores the operation and obstacles that the implementation of a play-based pedagogy by teachers encounters to ensure that young learners are naturally learning. In this chapter the study and analyses the findings and recommends the future direction on the application of play-based learning in pre-primary classes in Bangladesh. The findings demonstrate a gulf in the practice and impact of play-based pedagogy between urban and rural settings and the necessity to provide targeted intervention in efforts to overcome this deficit. I also make some recommendations for future research that could strengthen the theoretical development and application of play-based pedagogy in a variety of educational contexts.

5.2 Discussion

This is the discussion of my research results in accordance to the two research questions. It probes into the ways play-based pedagogy is enacted in urban and rural schools in Bangladesh as well as examines teaching practices that contribute toward the academic development of the pre-primary children through play-based learning. These findings are introduced to relevant theories and literature to further understand the current practices and challenges in the implementation of play-based pedagogy.

5.2.1 How is Play-Based Pedagogy Implemented in Urban and Rural Areas of Bangladesh?

Teacher knowledge and perceptions about play-based pedagogy play a significant role in the introduction of learning through play in both urban and rural school contexts in Bangladesh. Urban teachers are generally more knowledgeable and enthusiastic about play-based pedagogy than rural teachers. This difference is mainly attributed to the privilege of more resources in terms of training facilities, learning resources, and a more accommodating learning atmosphere. Teachers in urban environments benefit from well-appointed classrooms, plentiful teaching resources, and the ready assistance of pedagogical aids that can facilitate the incorporation of play (Lillard, 2017; Ginsburg, 2007). Conversely, rural school teachers typically receive less play-based training because professional development opportunities are fewer, and their classrooms tend to be overcrowded and under-resourced (Miller & Almon, 2009). Urban and rural schools are characterized by enormous disparities in the quantity and quality of play-based activities as encountered in the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Urban schools incorporate play-based activities into weekly programs and participate in action rhymes and group play at the start of the school year. The evolution of multimedia classrooms has also enriched the learning process by offering students a dynamic and interactive experience (Miller & Almon, 2009). Urban teachers claim that play-based pedagogy is an active learning approach through which young children develop essential cognitive and social skills during playtime, and they consider it vital for early childhood school success (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). In rural pre-primary schools, play-based activities are taught less frequently since these schools lack the necessary resources. Rural teachers report that large class sizes and a lack of sustained teacher training make it difficult to implement such innovative instructional practices. Consequently, rural teachers largely resort to traditional methods emphasizing rote-memory teaching rather than child-centered

activities (Hughes & Dunn, 2007). The research highlights three key issues hindering the effective delivery of play-based curricula in both contexts, including a lack of teaching materials, facilities, and teachers' training. These results align with studies recognizing the inequities between urban and rural schools in terms of resources, teacher training, and institutional support (Pyle & Biggs, 2015). These disparities result in an unequal educational experience, where children in urban schools receive developed, age-appropriate, and interactive learning experiences, while rural children face hurdles that block them from engaging with enriched play-based learning opportunities. Hossain and Alam (2018), who argued that rural schools in Bangladesh are severely constrained in practicing progressive educational activities due to a scarcity of resources and insufficient teacher training facilities. Consequently, while urban schools have been able to implement play-based pedagogy relatively successfully, rural schools face significant obstacles that curtail the adoption and effective use of such pedagogical methods. This underscores the need for policy interventions aimed at addressing these disparities in resources and professional development between urban and rural schools.

5.2.2 The Role of Teaching Practices in Play-Based Pedagogy for Pre-Primary Students' Academic Growth

The study found that teaching significantly contributes to young children's academic growth, but the effect of play-based learning was notably stronger in urban schools, where teachers were better trained and better resourced. Urban teachers made a strong connection between play and academic learning, using a variety of play-based strategies to support literacy, numeracy, social, and emotional skills in pre-primary classrooms. For example, teachers utilized educational games, role-play, and experiential learning in their daily teaching, which was more engaging for children compared to traditional methods. These practices not only

enhanced the academic capabilities of students but also contributed to their emotional and social development. This supports the findings of Pyle and Biggs (2015), who argue that play-based pedagogy promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity in young students' skills that serve as the foundation for academic achievement as the students' progresses through grades. In contrast, teaching practices in rural schools were less pronounced due to difficulties in implementing play-based methods. Although some rural teachers attempted to incorporate play activities, barriers such as limited play materials and insufficient training often hindered their efforts. Rural teachers face challenges including inadequate access to play materials, lack of teacher training, and few professional development opportunities. However, these issues are not exclusive to rural schools, as urban schools, despite being more resource-rich, also encounter similar struggles. For teachers in urban environments, the pressure to meet required tests and curricular standards makes it difficult to allocate time for play-based learning. Consequently, both rural and urban children face limitations in accessing the full academic and developmental benefits of a play-based curriculum, particularly in cognitive skills. In rural school settings, the shortage of play materials is especially concerning, with many teachers feeling they lack basic resources necessary for stimulating, hands-on learning. Overcrowded classrooms and limited facilities exacerbate this problem (Pyle & Biggs, 2015). These environmental influences often cause teachers to revert to traditional, teacher-centered approaches, as play-based learning becomes secondary (Hughes & Dunn, 2007). Teachers in rural areas also note that the lack of ongoing professional development in play-based curricula prevents them from fully engaging with play. Furthermore, many rural schools operate under strict standardized testing and curriculum mandates, which restrict child-initiated play (Miller & Almon, 2009). Urban educators, although more likely to have access to better resources, also struggle. Despite having multimedia and audio-visual teaching tools in classrooms that could support play-

based pedagogy, the emphasis on preparing students for competitive tests undermines the focus on play. Urban educators also report difficulties in reconciling play with the curriculum, citing that systemic demands to meet academic standards are a major barrier to effective use of play-based learning (Lillard, 2017). Even in resource-rich settings, the institutional focus on quantifiable results and high-stakes testing often detracts from the potential benefits of play-based pedagogy. Among the barriers to successful play-based learning in both rural and urban schools are the lack of resources and the prioritization of testing and standardized curricula. The restricted playtime limits the development of crucial cognitive, social, and emotional skills necessary for children's school success and well-being (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). A balanced approach to integrating play and learning, aligned with curricular standards and local resources, may help mitigate these barriers. Therefore, although the research demonstrates the value of play-based teaching in contributing to academic growth in pre-primary education, its impact varies depending on the quality of instruction and resources. In developed nations, higher levels of teacher preparation and resource availability allow play-based pedagogy to make a significant impact on children's academic learning. Research has shown that when properly implemented, game-based learning positively affects children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, all of which are essential for future academic success (Pyle & Biggs, 2015; Lillard, 2017). However, despite the potential of play-based activity as a vital component of early childhood learning in rural schools, systemic issues within these environments limit its efficacy. These challenges include a lack of access to teaching resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient professional development, which constrain teachers' ability to engage with play-based pedagogy (Miller & Almon, 2009; Hughes & Dunn, 2007). As a result, rural schools tend to either overemphasize or underutilize play in comparison to academic content, making it difficult to integrate play effectively into the curriculum. The study also highlights that

institutional and systemic barriers significantly impact the successful implementation of play-based pedagogy. In rural schools, particularly, the lack of institutional support and professional development exacerbates challenges faced by teachers in using play-based practices (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Furthermore, contextual barriers such as class size and the pressure of high-stakes assessments limit opportunities for play, as time and resources become compromised. These factors create a tension between promoting academic learning and recognizing the importance of play for development. Research has also underscored the lack of systemic support for play in rural education contexts, which reduces the effectiveness of play-based learning, especially in under-resourced schools (Ginsburg, 2007; Pyle & Biggs, 2015). In contrast, urban schools, which often have more resources and better opportunities for teacher training, are more successful at incorporating play-based instruction. However, systemic issues related to standardized testing and curriculum requirements can still constrain play-based learning, even in urban settings (Lillard, 2017). The challenge of balancing play with academic learning is common in both urban and rural schools, but it is often more pronounced in rural schools due to the compounded systemic issues. Despite global recognition of the value of play in early childhood education, play-based learning remains marginalized in Bangladesh's early childhood education system due to strong cultural and systemic constraints. Even as play-based pedagogy is increasingly advocated for its role in supporting cognitive, social, and emotional development, standardized testing and academic outcomes continue to dominate, particularly in rural contexts where meeting national curriculum standards is a priority. Teachers in these communities report a lack of systemic support for play-based learning, and the focus on academic achievement often detracts from the importance of play (Miller & Almon, 2009). Play-based pedagogy is promoted in Bangladesh as it is believed to be essential for fostering creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration skills among underprivileged young children, which are crucial for their long-

term academic success (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Yet, this advocacy faces significant resistance, as schools are deeply entrenched in traditional, academic-led methodologies and constrained by resource shortages and a lack of skilled teachers. While urban schools are more likely to adopt play-based practices due to their access to resources and professional development, rural schools continue to struggle with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, and insufficient pedagogical support (Hughes & Dunn, 2007). Despite widespread acknowledgment of the importance of play, Bangladesh continues to face significant systemic, institutional, and pedagogical barriers. These barriers limit the capacity of teachers to implement more interactive and child-centered pedagogical approaches, and the potential benefits of play-based learning remain untapped. As a result, rural children miss out on the experiences and advantages that should come with play (Lillard, 2017; Pyle & Biggs, 2015). Hossain (2017), who asserted that educational policies in Bangladesh must address the dissonance between pedagogical innovations and the dominance of academic testing. In urban schools, teachers have greater access to some professional development opportunities, though these are often brief and do not provide long-term support for integrating play-based pedagogy. In rural areas, teachers face greater challenges due to the lack of ongoing professional development and access to courses. Similarly, a study reported that short-term, one-time training for teachers was not effective in producing lasting changes in classroom behaviors, particularly regarding the integration of play-based learning into their teaching practices (Pyle & Biggs, 2015). Teachers in rural areas also indicate a lack of continued support after initial training, which hinders the effective implementation of play-based strategies (Miller & Almon, 2009). Both urban and rural schools encounter similar barriers to implementing play-based curricula, including a lack of sustained, long-term professional development, insufficient opportunities for reflection, and a lack of teacher networks for sharing resources and experiences. This issue is also highlighted in the literature. For

example, research by Bodrova and Leong (2007) emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development that goes beyond initial training and provides long-term avenues for support, reflection, and collaboration. Additionally, Ginsburg (2007) argued that teachers are unlikely to effectively implement play-based learning unless they receive continuous training and are supported by a system that facilitates its integration.

5.2.3 Influence of Parental Support in Implementing Play-Based Pedagogy in the Urban and Rural Settings of Bangladesh

In addition to the difficulties teachers face, the role of parents is equally important when it comes to the full implementation and success of play-based pedagogy. Parental attitudes and support for play as a learning method are crucial for ensuring its value outside the school setting. Parents in urban schools tend to have a better understanding of the importance of play in learning because they have been exposed to current educational models and more information. These parents often promote play in their children's learning, believing that it fosters creativity, social competence, and emotional health—qualities essential for children's school success (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). However, this is not the case in rural communities, where many parents, particularly in less-affluent neighborhoods, still adhere to traditional views about academic success that focus on time and effort spent on rote memorization and complex instruction. As a result, they may not provide the necessary support for play or understand its importance in the early childhood classroom (Pyle & Biggs, 2015). In rural areas, there is limited knowledge about the cognitive and social benefits of play, which leads to opposition to the play-based approach both at home and in schools (Ginsburg, 2007). This divergence in parental support for play-based learning in urban versus rural settings further complicates the challenges of play-based pedagogy, as rural children are not able to receive the same level of reinforcement and motivation from play outside of school as their urban

counterparts. Both urban and rural schools need to address the gap between parent expectations and educational practices by making a concerted effort to reach out to parents with information about the value of play for their children's development (Miller & Almon, 2009). Rahman (2020), who maintained that incorporating play into the education system of Bangladesh would require teacher training and increasing parental awareness and involvement. Without parental endorsement and understanding, the implementation of play-based pedagogy will be constrained, particularly in rural schools where there is still a strong emphasis on traditional academic values. To bridge these gaps, we must create training programs that provide teachers with ongoing professional development and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, share resources, and exchange ideas. Peer learning and support could contribute to more effective implementation of play-based programs, particularly in under-resourced settings (Lillard, 2017; Pyle & Biggs, 2015). Such sustained support is essential to help teachers, in both urban and rural settings, address the challenges they face and integrate play-based learning effectively into their teaching practices.

5.3 Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the potential of a play-based curriculum approach in expanding child development curricula in early childhood settings in Bangladesh. However, implementing this approach is easier said than done, particularly when considering the disparities between urban and rural schools. Urban educators are more likely to have the resources and training needed to successfully use play-based methods, while their rural counterparts face numerous challenges related to preparation and the use of these approaches, including infrastructure issues and a lack of resources, such as ongoing professional support.

Despite these limitations, the research underscores the importance of teaching practices that can significantly impact the academic progress of pre-primary students. One such teaching

method is play-based pedagogy, which, when applied optimally, not only fosters cognitive development but also enhances social and emotional growth, ultimately contributing to academic success. However, systemic and cultural barriers to play-based learning must be removed to ensure that all children, regardless of their location, have access to high-quality early childhood education. To achieve this, and to meet Bangladesh's commitment to inclusive and quality education (SDG 4), the government must address the urban-rural disparities in the educational system. This should include focused attention on resource allocation, teacher preparation, and mobilizing community involvement.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following are the recommendations for teachers, policymakers, and further research on play-based pedagogy in Bangladesh.

- There is a clear need for regular and ongoing teacher training in play-based pedagogy, especially in rural areas with limited access to professional development. Teachers require continuous support and training to implement these approaches effectively. Additionally, teaching guides should be updated every three years. Future research could explore the impact of long-term support in teacher education
- Schools need to cultivate a culture that encourages innovative teaching, like play-based approaches. Instead of dictating methods, the focus should be on creating an environment where teachers are motivated to experiment, collaborate, and share successful strategies. This can be supported through professional networks and peer mentoring programs.
- The community plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Schools need to inform parents about the importance of play in children's

development. Additionally, the community should be involved in providing affordable learning materials and creating safe play spaces for children.

- Non-teaching duties need to be exchanged by the respective replacement so that all the pre-primary teachers can give their concentration on classroom teaching.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Consent Letter

Letter of Informed Consent for FGD/ interview Participants

Title: “Exploring Play-Based Pedagogy in Urban and Rural Pre-Primary Public Schools in Bangladesh”

Dear Respondent,

Greetings,

I am Shahanaz Akter here with you for my thesis purpose and seeks your kind cooperation. My thesis title is “Exploring Play-Based Pedagogy in Urban and Rural Pre-Primary Public Schools in Bangladesh”. I am a Masters’ (MEd) student of BRAC University. In partial fulfillment of my Master’s degree, I must prepare a research paper.

For this purpose, I’m under taking the above-mentioned research project. In this respect, I seek your generous co-operation and you are cordially requested to participate in FGD. Note that all the information provided by you will be strictly confidential and your answers will not be published in any circumstances.

Your kind response will be used only for this academic research and this thesis report will not be published in the future. If you feel uncomfortable to answer any question, feel free to share. But you are requested to share the correct information that you believe to be.

I would really appreciate if I could take 1 hour of your valuable time voluntarily.

Yours Sincerely

Shahanaz Akter

M.Ed. Student,

BRAC University

Do you agree? (Put tick): () Yes, () No

Appendix B. Interview Guide

In-depth Interview tool

Name and Age:

Educational Qualification:

Gender:

Years of Experience:

1. How long have you been involved in play-based education?
2. Explain your experience teaching pre-primary level students.
3. What types of play-based education do you regularly include in your classroom?
4. What is the schedule of play-based activities, daily or weekly?
5. What impact do you think the use of play-based methods has on children's learning concepts for subjects like numbers, letters or problem solving?
6. What do you think are the benefits of play-based education in rural/Urban contexts?
7. What are your challenges in providing play-based education in your classroom?
8. What types of resources (materials, training, etc.) are there to support play-based education?
9. Are you sufficiently supported by the school to implement play-based strategies?
10. What is the importance of play in pre-primary education?

11. Do you want to make any changes in the implementation of play-based education in your school?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about the experience of play-based education or its impact on students?

Appendix C.

FGD Questions for Urban and Rural Parents

Parent Name and Age:

Educational Qualification:

Occupation:

Date:

1. What changes (if any) have your child made in their interest in learning or doing this type of education or skill?
2. What is your perception of play-based education on your child's ability in reading, writing or other basic concepts?
3. Why would you prefer play-based education for your child?
4. In your opinion, what are the challenges (if any) in implementing play-based education in urban/rural schools?
5. Have you heard of any schools with a play-based curriculum?
6. From your experience, what kind of support do you need for play-based education?

Appendix D.

Classroom Observation Protocol

Title: Exploring Play based Pedagogy in urban and rural pre-primary schools in Bangladesh.

School's name:

Location: Urban/Rural

Class Level:

Date:

Teacher's Name:	
Gender:	Topic:
Number of Students:	Observer's Name:
Number of classroom observation:	Time (duration of observation):

Classroom Environment	
Space and Resources	Remarks
Presence of designated play areas in the classroom.	
Availability of age-appropriate toys, learning materials, and resources.	
Flexible seating arrangement for play-based activities.	
Accessibility of materials to all students (urban/rural context consideration).	
Atmosphere	
Evidence of a welcoming and child-friendly environment.	
Visual displays promoting creativity and engagement (e.g., posters, artwork).	
Integration of cultural elements reflecting the local context.	

Teaching Practices Strategies	
Use of structured and unstructured play-based activities in lessons.	
Balance between teacher-directed and student-initiated activities.	
Encouragement of exploration, imagination, and problem-solving during play.	
Integration of play into various subject areas (e.g., language, math, science).	
Interaction of teacher-student	
Teachers actively engaging with students during play.	
Use of open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking.	

Teachers facilitating rather than directing play.	
Observing and assessing individual and group activities to guide learning.	
Student Engagement	
Students actively participating in play-based activities.	
Evidence of collaboration and teamwork among students.	
Opportunities for leadership and peer teaching during play.	
Creativity and Exploration	
Students demonstrating creativity through self-initiated activities.	

Inclusion of role-play and imaginative scenarios in activities.	
Academic Growth	
Evidence of language and communication skills development.	
Improvement in problem-solving and cognitive abilities through play.	
Use of play to support numeracy and literacy skills.	
Alignment of play-based activities with students' cultural and community context.	
Modifications made by teachers to suit urban or rural settings.	

Challenges and Observations	
Insufficient resources or space for play-based learning.	
Insufficient resources or space for play-based learning.	
Difficulty balancing academic demands with play-based pedagogy.	
Variability in teacher training and preparedness for play-based approaches.	
Observer's Notes	
Additional observations (if any):	

