PLAYFUL LEARNING IN THE PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOM IN BANGLADESH: TEACHERS EXPERIENCES OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP)

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ABSTRACT

This study is engaged in producing deeper knowledge of playful learning, grounded in teacher's perspective, and expanding our understanding of 'play'. Specifically, this study sought to find out pre-primary school teachers' perceptions of playful learning as a developmentally appropriate practice in pre-primary classrooms. Policy documents (e.g. NCTB, 2011, NAEYEC, 2009) discoursed the importance of being child centred, indicating to consider children's developmental ability. Through selective sampling, six preschool teachers were chosen. The teachers were interviewed using semi-structured configuration about their belief as to playful learning, how they implement playful learning in their classrooms and their viewpoint on barriers to playful learning. They identified the support factors that may be required to implement playful learning as developmentally appropriate practice. The preschool teachers made abundantly clear the significance of playful learning and its contribution to children's developmental ability. Though the views shared by the teachers did not conceptualize well the nature of play in pre-primary education setting, they valued and promoted a playful environment which they regarded helpful for fundamental capacities of child development. Teachers faced some challenges in providing play-based experiences, as they had to complete curriculum prescribed by Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). Some of the barriers teachers face are large class sizes, minimum contact time, lack of enough developmentally appropriate play materials and sufficient play spaces for playful learning. The need for training on continuous basis for professional development to improve teaching skills was also a challenge for the teachers. Based on the findings, implications for playful learning in classroom practice are deliberated and recommendations for future research are suggested.

Key words*: play, playful learning, developmentally appropriate practice.*

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy is that children learn through the development of playful activities (Walsh, et al., 2010). Consequently, at present the pre-primary classrooms have been focusing academically along with developmental benefits of play (Russell, 2011; Ashiabi, 2007). Play is learning for early years' children though it can be difficult to differentiate between what is playtime and what is task time in the pre-primary classrooms. Therefore, from this perspective, teachers must adopt different roles in different kind of activities in pre-primary classroom (Walsh, et al., 2010). In pre-primary educational settings child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported playful learning considered as developmentally appropriate best practice in general (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Bodrova and

Leong (2007) point out the significant role of play in preparing young children for rigorous of formal learning and high light about the current dilemma pre-primary teachers are facing whether to focus on teaching academic skills or strengthen developmentally appropriate activities for children.

Purpose of the study

I intended to undertake this research study stemming from my professional background as an assistant upazilla education officer, supporting primary school teachers for their professional developmental ability and have direct involvement in the pre-primary classroom observation. Playful learning is a crucial part for pre-primary classroom practice in preparing children for later development outcomes. The conceptualization of play should take into consideration developmentally appropriate practice in order to facilitate children's potential learning and development. Playfulness in learning certainly offers children opportunities for a good start of a pleasant experience outside of their home environment. Developmentally appropriate practice in pre-primary education rely on play based curriculum is recognized in newly national curriculum for pre-primary education in Bangladesh and what is more, PPE expansion plan has indicated that it is important to understand 'play' in classroom practice for high quality of pre-primary education (DPE, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to provide information on pre-primary teachers' belief and perspective relating to significant aspects of playful learning regarding classroom practice. It may identify any potential barriers that might have influenced policy to encourage playful learning in the classroom practices. It will also explore different strategies that could be useful for teacher's developmental ability. It is also hoped that the idea presented will challenge practitioners and policy makers thinking, and encourage reflection, further research on play and learning.

An overview of Playful structure in Pre-primary education

Children in Bangladesh begin pre-primary schooling in the January nearest their fifth years old and have to cope with a classroom environment. National pre-primary curriculum specified the meaningful implementation of observation, exploration, play, and play based activities as part of preschool teaching learning process (DPE, 2012). Every year generally all Government Primary School (GPS) get 5000 takas (47 Pound / 63 USD) from government's SLIP (School Level Improvement Plan) fund for purchasing need based teaching learning materials. Besides, all core materials teacher's guide, text book, children's work books, exercise khata, Bangla alphabet chart, flip chart (health and environment etc.) pictorial story books, story books, variety of flash cards (number, alphabet) , number charts are distributed before every new year from NCTB (Melesea, 2015). Research on, UNESCO Bangkok with support from the Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT) carried out case studies on promising practices in Education for All (EFA) in Bangladesh recent in 2015. From the case studies, it was identified that those assigned for pre-primary teachers were positive and enthusiastic with the relatively new introduced non-formal pre-primary education. Many of them already acquired knowledge about newly approved curriculum, teaching learning methods, play resources and games appropriate for preschools (Melesea, 2015). Despite these forward steps and much progression, challenges remain such as wide variations in quality classroom settings, training teachers, appropriate teaching learning materials (Zahar and Khandakar, 2017).

Significance of Study

Although there are plentiful studies on playful learning and its contribution to children's developmental ability conducted in many countries (Pyle and Danniels, 2016; Rice, 2015), there has been little research done in Bangladesh in investigating how pre-primary teachers in Bangladesh perceive play as to their classroom practice. However, PPE expansion plan has made indication for having deep understanding of play to achieve high quality of pre-primary education (DPE, 2012). In so far, I have been able to find two small-scale research studies in relation to 'play' carried out in the context Bangladesh. The first one is "Playing with mathematics: a pilot intervention to develop basic mathematical skills among pre-schoolers in Bangladesh" by Opel et al. (2006). The research design was pre-post assessment of an intervention and control group. The sample size was 80 pre-primary students. The aim was to increasing their basic mathematics skills through play-based activities. The second one is "Conceptualizing play as pedagogy in the ECE context of a development country: the case study of Bangladesh" by Chowdhury and Rivalland (2011). This socio cultural study was a small-scale qualitative approach, to investigate the views, understanding and perceptions of four pre-primary teachers and four parents regarding play as pedagogical tool in the ECE setting in the government primary school in Bangladesh. Chowdhury and Rivalland gathered (2011) views when the curriculum was only in its beginning phase. My work builds on this study by seeking the views on the reality of the curriculum as it has embedded in practice.

Theoretical framework of play

According to Bruce (1991), play helps children to use materials they know and apply them in new situations in a safe, secure context of playing. Bruce (1991) mentioned that12 distinctive features of play, are often used to assess and evaluate the quality of play: using first-hand experiences, making up rules, making props, choosing to play, rehearsing the future, pretending, playing alone, playing together, having a personal agenda, being deeply involved, trying out recent learning and coordinating ideas, feelings and relationships for the free-flow play. By recognizing of these characteristic features, teachers can cultivate the Quality of play. Moyles (1989) focuses the principles of play how these principles can put into practice for the children between ages of 4 to 8 in pre-primary educational settings. She argues for the guided play before free play. She presented three basic forms of play are as physical play, intellectual play, and social and emotional play.

According to Psychodynamic theorists (Freud, 1856-1939; Ericsons, 1950; and Winnicott, 1970), children use play to face difficulties and try to cope with their own life. Through play, children try to gain control for what is before them (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). Social constructivist theories were developed by Piaget and Vygotsky, both thought that play functioned purposefully to the enjoyment of the games and highlighted children as 'active learner' (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002, p. 231). Piaget divided play at three distinctive stages. The school years (5-8) was one of these stages. In that stage, children move into games from play. They abide by rules and are able to play more co-operatively. The rules of games are a given unlike the rules of play, which children make up as they go along (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). Vygotsky argued that play enable children to recognize what they are learning. He believed that play helps children to have better ideas and do better things in a real life situation. He mentioned about the Zone of Potential Development (ZPD), and the fact that children can do anything with the help of others, important for future learning and Zone of Actual Development when children can do anything without the help of anyone (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002).

Importance of play and playful learning

Play is first and foremost the fundamental child rights, one which the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) article 31 says that "…States parties shall recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (UNCRC, 1989)". Children have spent a considerable time in house of educational settings outside of home, but in general, their work is play (Wong and Logan, 2016; Pyle et al., 2017). Wilson (2009) argues that children's development and growth is developed through play. From a psychological viewpoint, Luntly (2018) suggests, "the ability for creative and imaginative engagement with and sustenance of the playful patterns of our aesthetic experience is core. Play's the thing that makes learning so much as possible" (p.36). (Hedges and Cooper, 2018) have stressed on play for the base of teaching learning interaction. Weisberg et al., (2015) support for on the implementation of guided play. They argue that guided play is productive and developmentally appropriate because this make pleasant learning environment that offers children to become more active in together. Rice (2015) has concluded that play learning is an acceptable approach to pedagogical practice. Play is viewed as a core process that can facilitate learning in many ways. Playful learning can be extremely helpful for children's motivation and improvement towards multidisciplinary learning. Playful learning approach has positive influence on the ontological within children. Pyle and Danniels (2016) reveal that the role of play in educational development is imperative. It is important to focus on both the need to meet children's wellbeing through play and the teacher's implementation of developmentally appropriate practice to ensure playful learning. A playful school environment has been related to higher child involvement in play, and to improved learning and development (Jones and Reynolds, 2015).

The Role of Play-based Learning

According to Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013) play based learning is a teaching approach in relation to playfulness, child-led along with adult guidance and scaffold learning objectives. Playful context in pre-primary classroom practices has been shown to have a positive influence on children in reading and math scores (Marcon, 2002; Stipek et al., 1998). For the same reason, it has been proven that playful learning is more effective than direct instruction (Han et al., 2010; Stipek, et al., 1995). Together with, academic benefit, researchers have found a correlation between play and positive social emotional development (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Elias & Berk, 2002).

Types play of materials

Bruce and Meggitt (2002) categorized two types of play materials according to guidelines for selecting play materials. These are pre-structured materials: the materials, which have limited way of doings things, full of repetitive tasks, little scope for imagination, and probably carry out a small range of physical actions. The other way,

pre-structured materials are so called educational toys, usually commercial expensive equipment in order to play. Open-ended materials: the materials, which have offered different way of doing things, vast, scope of imagination, and encourage children to play more deeply and carry out a range of fine and gross motors skills.

Strategic context: pre-primary education in Bangladesh

Pre-primary education in Bangladesh is less formal and more about helping children aged 5-6 years develop different skills of childhood. The main goal is to foster suitable children´s social, emotional, mental and health needs in preparation for entry into class one of formal primary education (Akter, 2012). Before the government initiatives, pre-primary education was predominantly accessible by the advantages groups (Moore et al., 2008). Then on, NGO´s began to initiatives pre-primary education easy access for the underprivileged groups. The Government of Bangladesh first introduced pre-primary education in public sector actively in 1992. The National Education Policy 2010 recognized pre-primary education as a fundamental part of formal primary education. The national curriculum for pre-primary education was approved in 2011 (DPE, 2012). By 2014, the Government of Bangladesh formally declared pre-primary education for all eligible children aged 5-6 years (Zahar and Khandakar, 2017). Bangladesh has made an inspirational level of success in pre school attendance (Zahar and Khandakar, 2017) and positive impact for 'school readiness and social development outcomes' (Spier, Vasudevan and Kamto, 2018 p.4). The gross enrollment ratio has increased from 23 percent in 2009 to 89 percent in 2012 ((Akter, 2012)). Subsequently, the children numbers has stood at 31,41104 by 2014 (MOPME,2014; Spier, Vasudevan and Kamto, 2018 p.4).

PPE Expansion plan made a powerful advocate on the key areas and elements of pre-primary education to understand the current level situations and desired level of quality in a phase manner. The basic level situation was from the year of 2012 and preferred level programmatic target and priority phase is projected for the time of 4- 5 years later (between2017 to 2020). In pre-primary education, this plan has indicated the more attention needs to wonderful learning environment. Sufficient classroom arrangements, adequate learning resources, desirable teacher learners' ratio, flexible daily routine were largely important to maintain excellent learning environment. Secure relationship between teacher and learners was found one of the central element of children developmental ability. To ensure a pragmatic learning environment, pre-primary education expansion plan emphasized a need for proper distribution of workload, optimum teacher learners' ratio, and requirement of training on professional development and other key supports personnel. For outdoor spaces, it was estimated at least 15 square feet per child for basic level standard and 35 square feet per child for preferred level standard. For classroom environment, the estimation was 250 square feet for 30 children, consecutively 17 square feet per child. According to pre-primary framework and curriculum, the basic level standard of teacher learners' ratio was expected 1:25 (maximum). Substantial supplementary materials would be available in the preferred level stages. Class would follow a daily routine as per curriculum with minimum contact 2.30 hours. In particular, friendly environment and facilities, support worker arrangement, resources and management structure were central concern to deliver care about to preschool age children (DPE, 2012). PPE service delivery standard suggested that at bingeing level of pre-primary education, teachers would facilitate class as per direction of curriculum but for the next preferred level, teachers would have facilitated play with clear understanding and involving all children in a balanced way (DPE, 2012).

Different types of plays are blended in the daily routine as per direction of the curriculum and annual work plan. In free play setting, there are four corners in the classroom like book and drawing corner, block and movement corner, sand and water corner and imagination corner. Learners can choice any corner and play individually or in a group. Twenty-two plays are selected for guided play for the year. Teacher can arrange play in the classroom or outside the classroom in school. Time allocation for both type of plays is 40 minutes out of 150 minutes (NCTB, 2017; NCTB, 2011).

Play in practice

The significance of playful learning is appreciated for pre-primary education in Bangladesh. Parents value play as part of leisure and recreational activities, where as teachers consider time spent in play that speeds young children's learning and helps them prepare for school. Moreover, both parents and teachers agree that play contributes towards young children overcoming their fears about school (Chowdhury and Rivalland, 2012). BRAC University Institute of Educational Development has conducted a studies and experiment to indicate the nature and extent of "playing with mathematics" in preschool in Bangladesh. From the research findings, it is found that children who participated in the math activity program by playing with different materials acquired more math skills than children attending the regular math program (Opel, et al,.2006). A government primary school, which was located in Gazipur district in Bangladesh, started pre-primary education in 2010.The school offered a good enough space for the pre-primary classroom to make it a comfortable environment for playful learning. The classroom was decorated with children's favourite colourful drawings they had painted and good availability to children of play materials. Young children and senior students of this school made many of the play materials. The pre-primary teacher used to follow child-

focused teaching learning methods. The classroom was a child friendly environment. There was a big playing field in front of the school building. The young children used this field for outdoor play and games. Parents are delighted by the overall playful learning environment and performance of their children. On the other hand, the picture of other government primary school was depressing. The school was located in Manikgonj District in Bangladesh. Like the other government schools, it introduced pre-primary education same year in 2010. Two teachers received training for conducting pre-primary classes. Total 30 children enrolled for pre-primary section in 2013. The classroom size was small enough for this reasonable number of students. Supplementary teaching learning matterials were not available. Appropriate playful learning environment was nonexistant in preprimary classroom. Moreover, two trained teacher's role for ensuring playful learning did not reflect in their performance. As a result, the students attendance rate was very poor. Parents demanded more spcious classroom and playful learning environment.

It was difficult to distinguish between curricular activities and co-curricular activities in BRAC classrooms. Because, the teachers used to blend playful activities while doing activities with language or mathematics. This ensured both teachers and students enjoyed the learning and classroom experience, which previously had been dull. Students preferred these kind of activities, but they had more eagerness when activities like play, singing or dancing were done. However, there was no specific play corner in the classroom (CAMPE, 2013).

Teachers professional development through DAP

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) notes that for best classroom practices development appropriate practice (DAP) depends on knowledge of how children learn and develop (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). It is however, important for teachers to know what level children are at, in order to support them in their development and learning. It recognizes three core areas of knowledge regarding teachers' developmental ability: the stage of knowledge a child has achieved, recognize each child as an individual, and about their cultural circumstances (NAEYC, 2009). Pre-primary teachers have to take many short term and long-term decisions in attempt to achieve desired goal regarding children's developmental ability. With this intention, DAP suggests considering 12 principles that are interrelated and collectively helpful in making solid decisions to meet the needs, as all aspects of childhood are challenging (NAEYC, 2009). To this end, DAP also includes five guidelines for effective pre-primary professional development. These include: creating a caring community of learners; teaching in order to enhance development and learning; planning curriculum to achieve set aims; along with assessing children's development and learning; and establish good relationships with families. The eventual outcome is to develop appropriate teaching practice, with focused goals for teachers, as well as engaging children (NAEYC, 2009).

Playful structure and developmentally appropriate practice

Walsh, et al., (2010) have suggested playful structure as adequate support for teachers' developmental ability. They have identified six pillars for playful structure. Each pillar is important and considered all these pillars are interrelated for the realization of classroom practice. Secure relationship between teacher and children is the main pillar for advancing developmentally appropriate practice, considered an essential element for learners to ensure optimal academic progress. Playful interaction is second pillar 'invites all interactions with and between children to be as playful and enjoyable as possible for all parties' (Walsh, et al., 2010 p.14). They recommend for both child-centred and child-led classroom but emphasis mostly on to be child-centred. Creating playful opportunities is the third pillar of playful structure and is about making plans for structured activities as well for play. The fourth pillar, appropriate structure, aims to understand children's stage of learning. The intention of it is for more clear instructions to develop children's capability. Subsequently, they should be given several options to develop resilience so that they can take the challenge in to account. Therefore, children's attention skills are considered more significant than behaviour for future school success. Lastly, the sixth pillar is managing progression and transition, helps learners to reflect increasing competence and engagement with learning. Pre-primary education practice is a natural progress from informal to formal context. Children able to cope with changing demand of curriculum.

Reviewing the literature on play in pre-primary classroom through developmentally appropriate practice leads to the conclusion that the role of the pre-primary teacher in supporting children's engagement through learning with play is of crucial importance. However, in the socio- cultural context of Bangladesh many adults, specifically parents of the children, see the prospect of them learning through play is problematic (Chowdhury and Rivalland, 2012).

Nevertheless, education policy, comprehensive curriculum, syllabus for pre-primary education in Bangladesh have indicated more attention to play in learning activities, aiming to achieve children's full potential and their future development (National Education Policy, 2010; National Children Policy ,2011; NCTB, 2011; DPE, 2012; NCTB, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Sample Selection:

Sampling is important both in qualitative and quantitative research. It is not possible to study individually, everywhere doing everything. Sampling decision needs lot of processes and settings like which people to interview, which event to observe (Punch and Oancea, 2014). In quantitative research, individuals become the part of sample because they are selection of a random technique (Flick, 2014). However, there are no specific summarizes of sampling in qualitative educational research due to "the great variety of research approaches, purposes and settings" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.211). The research interview protocol related to the people will be interviewed and from which groups these should be selected. On the other hand, sampling for interview focuses on the persons connected to the purposes rather than situations (Flick, 2014). The group, the researcher has proposed for this study, is pre-primary teachers who have been working with children to promote development and learning at pre-primary educational settings. Therefore, researcher has considered pre-primary teachers as sample type for this proposed study. The convenience sample size would consist of six pre-primary schoolteachers from Siddirgonj Thana at Narayangonj City Corporation in Bangladesh. Though, 'face to face' interview is the most common way of conducting semi-structured interview, the researcher has adopted telephone interview because of the convenience of the study (Waller, Farquharson and Dempsey, 2016), as the researcher has been staying in Scotland and wanted to collect data from his native country Bangladesh.

Method of data collection

Data collection is a process of information collection, in a unique way in relation to the purpose of proposed study (Birley and Moreland, 1998). With so many different types, interview is known the most popular and central data collection tool in qualitative research method. To explore the people's view and opinion, significance of meaning and situation, construction of the reality, it could be standard way to follow the interview data collection tool (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Questionnaires have many positive sides. Researchers can collect a lot of information from wide range of respondents within a short period of time (Menter et al., 2011). However, the disadvantage of the questionnaire method is that it does not accept additional questions to clarify or probe further for the proposed research study. Therefore, finally, in depth interview over the telephone appears to be the most suitable tool for collecting data in the proposed qualitative research method.

In the form of qualitative research method, interviewing has been categorized loosely in a wide variety of ways like structured interview, semi structured interview and unstructured interview. "The type of interview selected should therefore be aligned with the strategy, purposes and the research questions" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.184).

The researcher has focused on semi structured interview because, "structured interviews often produce quantitative data" (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006 p.314). In structured interviews, the set of questions is pre-defined with preset response categories. There is a little room for variation and in flexibility, but standardization is maximized. In this type of interview, the interviewer attempts to execute a value free role (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Fontana and Frey (1994), find that the nature of structured interviews is prone to rational rather than emotional. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) argue that unstructured interview is helpful in conjunction with the collection of observational data. Besides, unstructured interview is somewhat non-standardized, open ended and in-depth interview. This is the in-depth exploration of respondent experiences and explanation of their own expression. For successful in-depth interview, specific training is essential to develop the core area sorts of interviewing, interpretations and symbolic significance that do not come certainly (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

"Semi structure interviews are guided by a set of questions and prompts for discussion, but have in-built flexibility to adapt to particular respondents and situations, for these reasons they are among the most popular forms of interviews in education research, and are particularly favoured by beginning researchers" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.184). The semi-structured interview is not structured or unstructured. However, researchers can ask more follow up questions if it is necessary to explore the issues (Denscombe, 2010). It is most sufficiently used interviewing format for qualitative research, with other questions engaging from the dialogue between responded and researcher. Usually, semi structure interview can occur in a person or group at the same time with period of half an hour to several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). From all these aspects, semi structured interview would be potentially powerful perfect data collection method for the proposed study.

Interviews have different ranges, it is often "from one to one interviews, to focus groups, from face to face, to telephone, written and online interviews" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.213). Personal relationship and verbal and nonverbal communications are considered its strength. It is easier to work with a local sample. The researcher's mode of communication to collect data is telephone-based communication.

Data collection and analysis

In this study, audio mobile phone recoded interviews are the main approach to data collection. Prior to the formal interviews, the participants have signed a consent form and a participant information sheet that informed them all personal data and information collected for study would have remain confidential and anonymous as possible. The focus of the interview s on the pre-primary teacher's views on playful learning and their roles to support playful learning. The interview is in the form of questions formulated about playful learning and teacher's developmentally appropriate practice. The interview questions had been framed at the earlier stage of the research project and were given to the participants a week before their formal interviews. The in-depth semi-structure interviews lasts from 30 minutes to 59 minutes and the follow up interviews has lasted 10 to 20 minutes as well.

This qualitative interview questionnaire was conducted by main four questions:

(1) How do teachers in selected pre-primary school views play as a means to   learning?
(2) How do pre-primary school teachers see their roles in supporting playful learning?
(3) What do pre-primary school teachers see as barriers to implement play as a means to learning?
(4) What supports do pre-primary teachers need for professional development?

Since the first language of the teacher-participants and researcher are Bengali (the mother tongue of participants and researcher), the interviews have conducted in that language and interviews recorded through call recorder. Interviews have transcribed verbatim into Bangla and sent to each participant for their comments and verifications. Then the researcher has translated all the transcripts into English. The second follow up interviews have conducted to ask for further clarifications and further, to make sure the participants were comfortable with the initial interviews.

Data analysis process has started after the data collection was complete. From the data and information, a descriptive profile of participant was shaped that characterized understanding of their personal belief and perspective on playful learning and developmental ability. Then on the researcher has followed the thematic analysis, keeping an eye the instructions of Menter et al., (2011).

FINDINGS

Teacher's view on playful learning

The main theme, which emerged from the interviews, was the teacher's view on playful structure in pre-primary classrooms. In response to their views on playful learning, all six participant-teachers were positive and support playful learning in pre-primary classroom practice.

Teacher's attitudes

All of the participants believed that playful learning promoted a positive enthusiastic attitude to learning and encouraging children to be independent and confident for school readiness.

Teacher participant B revealed, "The process of learning does not have to be boring. Children love to learn in a joyful environment. They inherently motivated to learn in playful learning environment".   Teacher participant C stated that ´´Playful learning stimulates learners to be creative. It allows youngsters to be curious and allure them to see and test their conclusion´´.

Importance of playful learning

Most teachers noted that they felt that playful learning was inclusive and their efforts to develop children´s holistic development would have important long-term benefits. They believed that children were more engaged in a true love of learning, learned early, quickly and responsively.

Teacher participant B commented ´´Playful engagement provides children a natural love of learning. They become more attractive and attentive through playful learning. Playful learning has immense influence on child development in physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional dimensions´´.

Impact of playful learning

Several teachers also stated that it was a better to incorporate playful learning into the daily schedule of a pre-primary classroom practice. Because of this delightful mood of learning children want to attend preschool, in turn, they become ready for lifelong learners.

Participant F claimed that ´´Playful learning obviously is important for the pre-primary learners because they are limited by their oratorical and written language abilities. It does help to create more sympathy, more imagination, better social skills, less aggressive and show more control´´.

Teacher´s role in supporting playful learning

All teacher-participants brought up views on their roles in supporting playful learning most importantly as a facilitator with wide range of learning materials, guiding behaviours and engagement with children. As observers, their role was to make a plan in order to assess children's performance. Consequently, they met with parents to exchange the upgrade within a time frame.

Being as facilitators

Teacher A pointed that "I use alphabet and number cards to teach children concept of alphabet and number, bamboo sticks, stones, leaves, rejected pen, and clay-made shapes for shapes like circles, triangles, squares and rectangles, sticks, ball, children, trees etc. for concept of small and big, short and tall, hands and legs for right and left. They learn rhymes through acting roles according to theme. Physical exercise helps children both for physical fitness and counting like 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9".

Teacher B described, "In free play settings, there are four corners namely book and drawing corner, block and movement corner, sand and water corner and imagination corner. Children select their corner according to their choice and play. For guided play, the resources are like miniature cooking and eating utensils made of aluminium and plastic, furniture, different model of fruits, doll, car, music instruments, and colourful flowers made of paper and cloths, pillows, scarves and picture books and many more play items".

Teacher F mentioned, "My class usually starts with greetings and physical activity which would take few minutes. Through song and play, they learn how to clean and gather knowledge about cleanliness. As a child´s friend, I also take part into the guided play activity. During the free play time I become children´s peer who is without group work".

Being as observer

Many of the teacher-participants noted that observation was another big task of preschool teachers. They believed that observation was the pillar of children´s assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

Teacher F explained, "I prepare daily lesson plans according to approved routine. I make ready various activities with wide range of learning materials for the children to engage in. Every moment I monitor the children and their development. I record their progress. It is important to identify which children are doing well and which ones may need more attention and extra help".

Engaging parents' involvement

Teaches-participants revealed the views that they had responsibility and obligation to explain the parents about their children's development and learning progress a day in a month. They usually arranged parents' meeting any suitable day at last week of the month after completion of the pre-primary class and provide specific information about the children. Most of the teacher-participants agreed that they had positive interaction with parents. However, the majority of them expressed unhappiness because of low attendance of parents. The main reason was they found that most of the parents had been working in garments industry and usually found no time to be present in the meeting in day time.

Teacher-participant D stated "Despite these circumstances, I try to communicate with hem through phone or I ask other parents who are regular in the meeting to send the message of absent parents".

Challenges to implement playful learning

All teacher-participants acknowledged that they encountered many challenges incorporating playful learning in their classroom practices. Based on their responses, three sub-theme emerged from the data. The categories were namely environmental barriers, structural barriers and attitudinal barriers.

Structural barriers

Within this barrier, five elements emerged from data analysis. These were time, space, resources, staff training, content and curriculum.

Teacher participant B said, "150 minutes nonstop teaching learning contact hour and one teacher with 60 children large class size are two big barriers to ensure playful learning environment. It is near about impossible to transition smoothly one activity to another with play materials within time allocation without sufficient space arrangement".

Environmental barriers

Classroom environments, high teacher learner[2] ratios, teaching learning materials, sitting arrangement, rigid syllabus were considered as environmental barriers.

To ensure differentiate playful learning to each child in the large size number of children with mostly one-member pre-primary teacher within typically rigid syllabus could be seen as difficult matter.

Teacher-participant A asserted "This year (2018) the number of enrolled children for pre-primary classroom is 78. So many often, it's difficult to conduct meaningful learning at the point of play based activities".

Teacher D said, "Our school is high school attached. There is no inclusive space for outdoor play. Even, the pre-primary classroom is used for primary section. Classroom is very congested and crowded with over 60 children. Children have to sit in the bench. In most of the classroom, table and benches took much of the space. There is no attached toilet and sanitation facility."

Teacher B said, "Our routine and syllabus is curriculum specific. So I feel pressure to cover routine task on due time".

 Attitudinal barriers

Parental expectation, Para teacher or parental supports, workload were considered as an attitudinal barrier.

Teacher A stated, "It is for some or many parents want to see the play reduced. They think play is the waste of time only". In addition, teacher E put that `They (parents) mention that children find enough time to play at home. School is the house of learning. We are under great pressure to meet parent's inappropriate expectation of spending more time being taught in the form rote learning or repetition and tested on literacy and math skills in the form competition".

Factors to support for developmental ability

It was the desired of teacher- participants to receive regular trainings particularly, on playful structure, assistance from support workers and smaller class size with excellent space. Subsequently, these would be a huge support and some possible solutions appropriately to the teacher's developmental ability. Significantly, two of them expressed view on dialogue forums and school cross visits for part of their developmental ability.

Training focusing on playful structure

All six participants revealed the immense need for training on playful learning. The trainings should be based on child wellbeing, play, playful behaviour and play based activities. It would be offered to teacher´s assistants, parents, administrators and adults who had have interpretation and interaction with pre-primary education as well.

Participant B observed, "Children learn best when they are in secure attachment. Therefore, we need to know about their individual differences, home culture and condition of their attachment. Children learn to different ways. So we need to know a wide variety of teaching strategies and use appropriate strategies depending on children's uniqueness".

In addition, Participant B argued, "the administrative and training division can arrange a three days orientation program for the volunteer or the Para- teachers more importantly on play and playful learning".

Participant D said, "We need to know the appropriate strategies of playful learning and its proper use in early year's settings. We need to receive training on play and playful learning. The sufficient knowledge, understanding and skills of play and playful learning are imperative to all who have interaction and affiliation with early year's educational settings".

Participant E described "Teacher's playful behaviour is an important area where I think, we need to improve our professional development ability more fully because, it may help us to give more idea how I can make a timely nurture of playful environment in different situations in the classroom practice''.

 Smaller class sizes and more spaces with comfortable environment:

Most of the teacher- participants believed that teacher-children ratio was too high and unfavourable to implement playful learning in the classroom practice. Smaller class size would be favourable to manage all aspects of playful activities. Many of them suggested opening double shift or more sections to bring the size down to a ration where playful learning in more likely to happen in small class. Natural, affording, challenging, creative spaces also hugely important for children´s daily outdoor play opportunities.

Participant F wondered, "With large class size, it is difficult for me to handle these young learners in time of free play activities in four corners. I can´t communicate many of them when they are in need. It would be very possible to more one on one time with individual learner in a small classroom".

Teacher participant E described, "Space is an enormous challenge, with the large size of 60 learners. School should have substantial standard beautiful space for nurturing both indoor and outdoor games".

Higher number of teacher assistants or parent helpers

Major teacher- participants felt deeply the need of more hands in the classroom practice for better learning and educational outcomes. Only one in six participants who had have two or three parents come sometimes voluntarily to assist in the class activities. It became troublesome to manage the whole class play activities in single-handed. Significant observation and the responsible engagement are possible with the helping hands.

Teacher-participant A recommended, "It needs support workers for a large number of 78 children like an overcrowded classroom. We can take assist from parents".

Teacher participant B commented that sometimes two or three parents voluntarily come to assist me in the classroom activities. Their presence is much more helpful to meet the necessities of either individual or collective groups or even maintain resource materials.

Teacher participant F elaborated, "Children come from home house to school house. Therefore, they need more assistant and cooperation in new environment and appearances. While teacher assistant or parent's helper definitely helpful, many often we just need more to maintain the situations either inside or outside classroom".

The participant- teachers were interviewed about their belief relating to playful learning, how they implement playful learning in their classroom practice and their viewpoint on challenges to implementation and factors to support in more structure and guidance to ensure playful learning at the heart of classroom practice. In asking teachers about their views of playful learning, it came across quite strongly that they believe playful learning was quite important. Moreover, its need and impact on children is learning and development. The second theme of teacher's role in supporting playful learning concentrated on as a facilitator, as being observer and engagement with parents and community people. The third theme of challenges to implement playful learning explored namely environmental barriers, structural barriers and attitudinal barriers. Finally, the theme components for supports need for developmental ability were three pronged with a focus on training on playful structure, a focus on smaller class sizes and more spaces with comfortable environment and a focus on higher number of teacher assistants or parent helpers (with community involvement).

Together, the findings from all the teachers interviewed revealed the importance of playful learning and its' possible contribution to children developmental ability. As the participant shared, playful learning in classroom practice was both very fundamental and prone to challenges. Given all the barriers mentioned, most of the participants frequently emphasized support groups, regular trainings and affordable environment were valuable and necessary to keep them inspired and strengthened to continue their work. At a glance, the findings of the interview presented by a chart:

DISCUSSION

According to the newly approved national curriculum for pre-primary education, Bangladesh (2011), the pre-primary education settings ought to provide play based teaching learning, with the aims of promoting children's wellbeing and developmental ability. In the pre-primary education settings, all teacher-participants were positive about their approach to deliberate and thoughtful preparation of play based education curriculum practice. Playful learning was described as young learner's active, interactive, related and interrelated delighted activities in a wonderful environment. However, in some aspects within the experiences and attributes of teacher-participants, these might have influenced their belief and practices with regard to play. The importance of play was largely associated with the assumption that the children enjoy play activities, so it is only a responsibility to provide opportunities for playful pre- structure in educational setting in particular of free play and guided play.

Participants views of play revealed that type of activities considered as play in the classroom practice were mainly teacher controlled and directed with only 20 minutes for guided play and 20 minutes for free play out of 150 minutes' session (NCTB, 2017; NCTB, 2011). Besides, playful learning was acknowledged as a source of motivation and attraction preparing them for formal school. Children´s aesthetic imagination was considered core in the context of pre-primary education, receiving a great deal of attention in the literature by Luntley, (2018). Rice (2015) states this is consistent with findings from 'playing with mathematics' studies by Opel et al. (2006) who reported that relationship existing between play and math and logical thinking were embedded in playful context in Bangladeshi pre-primary schools. Children can learn better and faster, and achieve more skills through play-based activities than on traditional repetition teaching (Opel et al., 2006; Jones and Reynolds, 2015).

The interviewed findings revealed that to engage children in learning activities teacher-participants acted as friend, role model, and playmate. They would provide wide ranges of play based learning materials but many of these were insufficient to explore to meet the children curiosity (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). To this end, all the core teaching learning materials NCTB distributed in each government primary schools mostly were pre-structure materials (Melesea, 2015). By comparison, teacher-participants provided various examples they used play materials only few of these items were open-ended materials, did indicate limited way of doing things, more repetitive tasks with little scope for imagination and in turn discouraged children to play more deeply to see the conclusion (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002).

The barriers to playful learning are important to compare to the list for supports that might increase teachers' development ability. In the study, teacher-participants shared the need to increase considered number of teacher assistants or parents' helper alongside the teacher in the classroom activities might have the biggest impact on implementing and promoting playful learning. The young learners would benefit with additional one or more pair of

hands for interactive free and guided play, to facilitate available play resources and help to develop problem solving in different perspectives, which was also stressed by Pre Primary Education (PPE) Expansion Plan (DPE, 2012).

Larger class size and limited spaces also were named as big barriers. The teacher- participants desired a little break time in the structured of daily routine. They agreed a smaller size class would give them more one on one time and opportunities to fill the need of individual children´s enormous demand. Overall, some breakout spaces for children were hugely important their wellbeing and educational outcomes, similar to the barriers as reported in the literature of PPE Expansion Plan (DPE, 2012). A reciprocal relationship with parents was an integrate part teacher's responsibilities (NCTB, 2011) and placed one of the five guidelines for effective teacher's developmental ability (NAEYC, 2009). However, one   unfortunate problem was that large numbers of parents used to remain absent or irregular in the parents meeting because mostly of them were working parents unable to manage time for the part of day. Moreover, teacher-participants spoke about parents lacking understanding of play and prone to more academic success in expectation was similar to the literature study of Chowdhury and Rivalland, (2012).

All pre-primary teacher-participants in this study shared how they manage to cultivate playful learning in their zone of classroom practice as a developmental ability. They continued to desire professional development opportunities to reinforce young learners´ playful activities considering each child's developmental ability. It would be relevant to identify the factors that support them in the use of developmental appropriate practice, and help overcome the challenges of teaching playful learning (NAEYC, 2009).

The teacher-participants focused more on regular training for them and other stakeholders to have deeper understandings on playful structures. They identified training in the areas of secured attachment, playful behaviours, nature of play and play materials. Similarly, PPE Expansion Plan prescribed different trainings and continuous professional development of teachers, together at least a short orientation programme for key supporters in relation to pre-primary education (DPE, 2012). Moreover, most of the teacher participants identified wanted to gather more knowledge on the core area of play and playful structure. In this manner, Walsh et al. (2010) identified six pillars of playful structure, which might determine for playful classroom realization and advancement of teacher's developmental ability. These pillars were establishment of secure relationship, playful interaction, creating playful opportunities, providing appropriate structure, respecting individual differences and gradual progression and transition.

The limited view of secure attachment, inevitable part of children's development was highlighted in the literature (NAEYC, 2009; Walsh et al. 2010). In keeping with Pinchover (2017); Walsh et al. (2010) view, one teacher-participant emphasized on the need of playful behaviour, which was determined in creating quality classroom environment and thereby enhancing children playfulness. Pleasing environment pre-schools, in Reggio Emilia, described as the 'third teacher' (Clark, 2007). Playful and friendly classroom environment contributed children to be more regular in attainment and higher involvement in learning activities (Luntley, 2018; Hedges and Cooper, 2018). The evidence was found in case studies in Bangladesh that the children of the school, which offered a good enough space, colourful decorated classroom and followed child, focused teaching method with wide range of play materials performed well in learning and development. Parents of that children were delighted and happy (DPE, 2012).

 By contrast, the school, which was non-appropriate pleasing environment even with two trained but passive teachers, had to suffer for children's poor attendance rate. Parents were unhappy and demanded more space and playful learning (DPE, 2012). In this similar context, one teacher-participant shared the different view that teacher's intention might be determinant factor to children's regular attendance and expected learning outcome (Epstein, 2007). Whereas, two teacher-participants also mentioned opportunities for dialogue forums to share their knowledge and hear from others (Billet,2011) as well as minimum two or three guided visit nearest schools in a year (DPE, 2012). In these engagements, it is easy to share professional knowledge and exchange experiences. While at the same time this kind of engagement might be helpful to promote a sense of teamwork, collegiality and normative comparison attitudes with the teachers group (Debra, 2018). Moreover, this kind of pedagogical interaction may also decrease professional isolation, maintain cognitive ability in the classroom practice and improve morale to make better learning environment (Debra, 2018).

Overall, the findings revealed that all of the teacher-participants were positively disposed and always aware of the fact that learning should be child-centred through playful activities. However, at the same time the extent and readiness of the immediate classroom environment varied between many schools, sometimes preventing the adoption of play based teaching practices. All of the teacher-participants advocated for play based knowledge, some had voiced on the issue of more helping hands to assist in the class activities. Establishing a reciprocal relationship with children's family was also a major concern for many participants. Two among of them shared for dialogue forum and guided cross-schools visit to exchanges the professional knowledge. Such viewpoints by these teacher-

participants had delivered the further evidence that pre-primary teacher in Bangladesh willing to meet the challenges and tensions for quality of pre-primary education.

CONCLUSIONS

The research topic of the current study is "Playful learning in the pre-primary classroom in Bangladesh: Teachers experiences of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)". Guided by four research questions, this study has investigated and delivered answers to each of these questions through its findings. The data has obtained from semi-structure interviews.

To repeat research question one: how do teachers in selected pre-primary school view play as a means to learning? The teacher participants had described that play as inclusive, helps to promote children in all aspects of development. They believed that children learned early, quickly and responsively through playful learning and had long-term positive impact for later learning.

For research question two, how do pre-primary school teachers see their roles in supporting playful learning? The findings of the study discovered that teacher-participants brought up views of their roles as facilitators' (teaching-learning materials, guiding behaviour, engagement with children); as observer (planner, assessment for learning); and engaging parents for reciprocal relationship.

For research question third, what do pre-primary school teachers see as barriers to implement play as a means to learning? The findings of this revealed three categories of challenges namely structural barriers (time, space, resources, staff training, content and curriculum); environmental barriers (classroom environments, high teacher-learner ratios, teaching learning materials, sitting arrangement, rigid syllabus); and attitudinal barriers (parental expectation, para teacher or parental supports, work load).

Lastly, for research question four, what do pre-primary teachers desire the supports they need for professional development? The findings of this study had identified the factors need for regular training (child development, playful structure) for both them and third parties who are involved in pre-primary educational settings; assistance from support workers; more spaces with pleasing environment; more sections or shifts for large classroom; and dialogue forums and cross-schools visit for peer interactions.

Implications for practice

Regular and refresher trainings after a period for pre-primary teacher professional development appears to be particularly significance here. Also have suggested by PPE expansion plan for 12 days' basic course in first year and 6 days from the next year as well as at least 2 refresher trainings in a year minimum three days (DPE, 2012). Despite this, all the teacher-participants attended 15 days' basic course training within them on average six years in pre-primary education services. To this end, pre-primary teachers should continually provide professional development training to improve practice, self as professional, multi-professional manner. It is evident that, in service training of pre-primary teachers helps to improve the quality of pre-primary classroom environment, to handle pressures of classroom preparation and challenges of differing expectations with interested parties (for example, parents, head teacher, academic supervisors and administrators) (Mangione & Maniates 1993; Sherman & Mueller, 1996; Smith & Croom, 2000). Eventually, the teacher-participants placed high value on training like in the areas of child developments and children wellbeing, nature of play and learning, playful behaviours, and appropriate teaching learning materials.

On the other hand, the administrators and others involved in pre-primary education can provide support to the teachers by way of creating a conducive classroom environment, which maintains play based learning. Structural supports such as teaching resources, appropriate play materials, early year's childhood related conferences and workshops will help to update teachers with knowledge of classroom appropriate best practices. The interviewed teacher-participants expressed interests in engagement of 'dialogue forums' and visit to other school sites to share their knowledge and hear from other colleagues. This organized, shared, practical understanding may also be helpful in reducing the professional segregation and improve the sense of teamwork, along with maintaining the cognitive development and normative comparisons with their colleagues; promote morale and led to developmentally appropriate practices.

Knowledge about play and learning, aspects of child development is equally important, overlapping with the community-at-large and in particular, parents. Teacher-participants, shared, in particular parents' worry about play as to promoting children's learning and development. Therefore, there may be a need to educate parents with regard to the importance of play-based learning for pre-primary children. This is may be an indication to pre-primary practitioners, administrators and policy makers to resonate this attitudinal barrier to establish positive mindset of parents to accept pedagogical innovations through concerted and targeted educational campaigns or short orientation programs.

In a large size classroom, it is often very challenging for one teacher to communicate with and handle so many young learners. It also becomes difficult to smoothly transition from one activity to another with play materials within the time allocation. It might be a good idea to consider additional teacher assistance or parent helpers alongside in the classroom activities for interactive playful learning. The teacher-participants agreed that smaller size would give them more one to one time and help to develop problem solving in different perspectives. Therefore, it may be potentially helpful to instigate a double shift pattern or divide the class into different sections for child wellbeing.

On the global competitive world, nations are constantly focusing on comprehensive approach addressing the issues of quality and accountability of pre-primary education (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). In this perspective, perhaps it is crucial for Bangladesh to take the big step of ensuring that pre-primary teachers are graduate level trained - as the participants in this study are - or with a least many one year is pre-primary training experiences similar to the Asian countries of South Korea and japan (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) have demonstrated that teacher who has better education are more likely to perform good fit play interaction.

Bangladesh has given priority to improving pre-primary education extensively and believes that richer understanding of play is a necessity for providing a high standard of quality pre-primary education (DPE, 2012). It has achieved much in terms of quantity. Now it is targeting excellent quality education. Moreover, duration of pre-primary education is expected to extend for another one year for children aged four (MOPME, 2008; National Education Policy, 2010; Spier, Vasudevan and Kamto, 2018). Therefore, the role of the pre-primary teachers in supporting children's engagement with playful learning is of crucial importance. For more playful learning, Carter (1993) suggested teachers first need to identify their perceptions towards play, then they need to observed and perceive children's play. After closely observing the first two stages, they will have to move to the third stage of training, which includes various playful activities allowing them to behave in the same manner in order to engage with the children.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There has been growing national concern to put in place high quality pre-primary education and standard services for young children (DPE, 2012). Research, including different studies over the long period across in many countries established that high quality of pre-primary education helps young children to succeed in school and become better citizen (NAYEC, 2009; Harsh-Pasek et al., 2009). The researcher suggests that future researchers using larger samples, comprising of more pre-primary schools and teachers sharing their experiences, may extend this small-scale research study. The area of this study also be meaningful included to embrace of administrators and parent's perspectives, may serve to supplement to the perspectives of pre-primary teachers in addressing potential barriers to be addressed by policy makers. More importantly, play in children with special educational needs is a very basic research topic. In addition, further research should be taken on developmentally appropriate practice and wide variety approaches with a view of cultivating the positive aspects of play and developmental ability. Most likely, it is high time to deploy resources to take longitudinal studies on 'playful learning' in an effort to ascertain the long-term benefits for young children, which will enhance the future prosperity of Bangladesh.

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