

CONCEPTUALISING PLAY AS PEDAGOGY IN THE ECE CONTEXT OF A DEVELOPING COUNTRY: THE CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH

Nurun Nahar Chowdhary and Corine Rivalland

Play performs a significant role in early learning and development. This paper reports on the study which examined how play is understood, incorporated, and practiced in the early childhood educational context of Bangladesh. The socio-cultural study explored the understandings, views and perceptions of families and early childhood educators of four semi-rural public pre-primary classes in Bangladesh. Findings indicate that the interpretation and incorporation of play, influenced by the socio-cultural and educational contexts of given society, differed from the Western understandings and practices. Young children's active and interactive joyful activities, such as working with learning apparatuses, physical exercises, singing, acting, rhyming, games, outdoor plays and drawing, were described as play. It was considered as a means of developing academic skills through following the teacher's instructions in correct ways. Despite unfavourable educational environment play was incorporated as classroom practices that inspired young children's learning.

KEYWORDS: Play, Young Children, Classroom Context, Play Materials, Learning Apparatus, Bangladesh, Teachers' Role.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, play is considered as an important element of early learning. Recently initiated early childhood education (ECE) programme in the public sector in Bangladesh also acknowledges play as a part of pedagogy. In Bangladesh a free ECE programme was introduced in the public primary schools in 2010. Both its ECE curriculum, developed in 2011, and the Operational Framework for Pre-primary Education of 2008 recognise play as an instrument to accelerate the learning and development of the young children. However, in the educational context of Bangladesh learning is mostly rote-based. Overcrowded classrooms are managed by one teacher and lessons are delivered in a linear fashion to the passive learners. The combination of an imported pedagogical concept of play, nourished and flourished in the developed Western societies, and the traditional educational culture of a developing society grounded the necessity to investigate the nature of incorporating play as a pedagogical concept. This paper reports on the study which examined how play is understood, incorporated, and practiced in the early childhood educational context of Bangladesh. Findings

provide policy makers, early childhood professionals, educators, and academics with new understanding on how play is conceptualised by families and EC educators in Bangladesh.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF PLAY AS PEDAGOGY

Play is considered very significant in the development of young children in the domains of socio-emotional, cognitive, physical and literacy skills (Kieff and Casbergue, 2000; Moon & Reifel, 2008). It is acknowledged as an “easy means of learning for young children, as they are naturally drawn to it and want to get involved in it” . However, there is no single or comprehensive universal definition of play in educational settings . Some identify play as the child's work while some explain it as the child's way of learning . Since play includes divergent activities, the literature expresses interest in different types of play and different dimensions of play behaviours. For example, Queensland's Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) narrated following activities as educational play:

- Socio-dramatic play: Children setting up and running a flower shop.
- Fantasy play: Children creating props for space adventures.
- Exploratory play: Exploring the properties of new manipulative or construction materials; looking through magnifier/ lenses to see how they work and the effect they have.
- Manipulative play: Doing puzzles, making necklaces or constructions.
- Physical play: Running, hopping, skipping, climbing, moving through obstacle courses.
- Games with rules: Playing board and card games; outdoor games; child-created games.

While engaged in different types of play young children are able to understand the world around them which helps them in problem solving, and developing their self-confidence and self-regulation . Further, play materials, time allocation and space arrangements influence children's learning and development through play. Therefore, success of play method depends on how it is integrated into the teaching-learning strategies and implemented in practice by the teachers.

However, interpretation and incorporation of play as pedagogy is greatly influenced by the cultural context. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) further state that knowledge, experiences and cultural values determine the meaning and value of play to individuals and these dynamic meanings evolve according to the contexts and circumstances. Meanwhile Tobin, Hsueh and KarasFawa (2009) maintain that both context and time are very important, as the socio-

cultural, economic and political factors which determine the ECE policies and practices of a particular country change over time, as they have observed in China, Japan and the United States.

Research indicates that the cultural nature of play in Bangladesh is different from conceptions of play in the developed countries. In rural Bangladesh young children have less access to stimulating and complex play materials at home and at public schools there is very limited access to play material for them to explore. Moreover, adults' reluctance, particularly that of mothers, to encourage children's play or be involved, reflects a cultural scenario different from that of Western culture.

METHOD

The present socio-cultural study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the views, understandings and perceptions of four EC teachers and four parents regarding encompassing play as a pedagogical tool in the ECE settings in the public sector in Bangladesh. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and photographs.

RESEARCH SETTINGS AND PARTICIPANTS

Four pre-primary classrooms at four randomly selected public primary schools in semi-rural Bangladesh were studied in this research. In Bangladesh at primary schools, classes are held from grade one up to grade five in two shifts for six days a week. As per newly adopted ECE policy pre-primary class is held in these schools in the morning shift for two and a half hours. Like most of the public primary schools the studied schools lacked infrastructural facilities and resources.

From these schools four EC teachers and four parents of the children of the respective pre-primary classes were randomly selected and interviewed. The teachers were basically primary school teachers but provided with a six-day Pre Primary Education (PPE) training course by the government. Apart from their responsibilities to teach in the primary level classes they were assigned the pre-primary class by the school authorities. These teachers, aged between 30 to 40 years (with 4 to 20 years of teaching experiences), belonged to the middle class. However, the parents (aged between 30-35 years) were from the low socio-economic class (LSC) background. Their educational background varied from illiteracy up to Grade Ten. Majority of them were house wives and one used to work in other peoples' houses as a maid. Coincidentally all the teacher and parent participants of this study were females.

DATA ANALYSIS

Since the first language of the participants was Bangla the interviews were conducted in that language and audio-recorded. Interviews were first transcribed verbatim into Bangla and then translated to English. During data processing, analysis and discussion pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants such as Selina, Nasrin, Asma and Sathi for teachers and Kulsum, Fulbanu, Rogina and Johra for parents. Besides, codes were used, such as A, B, C and D, for the schools. During analysis, several themes emerged from the comparing and contrasting of data.

FINDING

PLAY ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL

Rogoff (2003) maintains that the activities or behaviours which are considered appropriate as play in one culture may not necessarily be considered as play in another culture. Therefore, the research focused on how the participants interpreted play as a pedagogical concept and how it was incorporated in the classroom practices. In the present study the terms that teachers and parents used to explain children's play behaviours and teachers' play practices in the classroom are as follows:

- *Working with Learning Apparatuses*: All the teachers used this concept to explain their play practices in the classroom. They used bamboo sticks, rejected pens, beads, stones, leaves, bangles or clay-made shapes to teach children the concept of shapes like triangles, circles or squares through hands-on experiences. The parents (Fulbanu and Rogina) also noted that the children enjoyed learning through these activities. (Figure 1& 2)



Figure 1: A young girl drawing circles with a bangles



Figure 2: Teacher guiding young children to make houses with bamboo sticks

- *Rhyming*: The teachers described rhyming as play activities that they practised through acting roles according to a theme. Teachers used to follow the textbook and curriculum in this regard.

- *Doing Physical Exercises:* The physical exercises, as prescribed in the curriculum, were explained by the teachers as a source of enjoyment for the children. They (Nasrin and Shathi) considered these activities as helpful to maintain young children's physical fitness and also to learn counting. (Figure 3)



Figure 3: Teacher demonstrating how to do a physical exercise



Figure 4: Young children acting and singing with the teacher

- *Singing and Acting:* All of the teachers stated that they practised acting with songs and physical movements as group activities to develop children's knowledge about certain words and letters. Selina noted that children liked these activities very much and repeated these activities during their free play time. (Figure 4)
- *Story Telling:* While talking about play practices in the classroom the teachers (Selina and Nasrin) also mentioned story telling as included in the curriculum and prescribed in the teacher's guide.
- *Drawing:* Teachers remarked drawing as a play activity. They used to teach children how to draw circles, necklaces or flowers with a bangle or how to draw a house. Nasrin and Shathi mentioned that children in their classes used to engage in this activity during free play time. (Figure 5)



Figure 4: Teacher showing a young girl how to make a necklace with stones

- *Outdoor Play*: Outdoor play included activities with equipment like swings, slides or seesaws. Shathi noted that she allowed her students to get involved in these activities. The children in rest of the schools did not have access to these play facilities. Teachers and parents (Asma, Shathi and Rogina) were more concerned about the children's safety regarding these activities, which they considered purely recreational.
- *Sports*: The parents (Kulsum and Fulbanu) used this term to explain their children's play activities. Sometimes teachers (Selina and Nasrin) also used this concept to explain the children's play behaviors outdoors. Nevertheless, these activities were not reported as being related to learning.
- *Games*: Teachers (Selina, Nasrin and Shathi) reported that twelve structured games were included in the curriculum as children's play. They seemed to practise only one game "mala go mala" (a song based play as mentioned above in the excerpt of Nasrin). These games were aimed at fostering certain socio-emotional, cognitive and physical aspects of the development of young children in accordance with their age .

In the following excerpt Nasrin explained how she employed some of the above mentioned play activities as teaching-learning techniques to accelerate children's literacy and numeracy learning and provide them with the knowledge of shapes.

Nasrin: I taught them the letters 'Shore O' and 'Shore Aa' [Bengali letters] by singing and playing 'Mala Go Mala' [a song based game]. And then through the physical exercises, ... in those ... they are learning numbers like 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and so on through repeating what I'm saying. ... through rhymes. ... they learn through play materials like stones, sticks, beads, for example, making a house and triangle or square shaped structures using sticks; making a necklace using beads and stones; or playing with bangles. Sticks to make shapes like triangles and squares. We use the rejected pens and also use shapes made of clay materials.

To develop concepts like shapes, letters, words, counting and even health lessons, the above- mentioned activities were adopted as teaching-learning techniques along with other traditional methods like reading, writing and memorizing. Government's ECE policy supported this approach of the teachers.

Selina: We are told [during PPE training] to teach children playfully. There are different plays, there are stories also, and songs. Through songs and plays they could be provided with the primary concepts of cleanliness etc.

Parent participants appreciated these classroom activities. Besides, both teachers and parents admitted that play access would alleviate the feeling of fear about school that many children seemed to experience.

Rogina: It is better that here [at school] she [young daughter] learns the ways to study; she gets the time to adjust and overcome the fear too. The things they [teachers] teach to the kids are enhancing their knowledge. And the habit of schooling is building up inside the children. They can know about school and the fear about learning or study is erased from their minds. I think that through playing the pressure of study becomes less. The children are motivated in studying if they get the chance to play.

Nasrin: ... fear [exists] among them [young children] about the school ... fear about study load ... fear of school, of rules Because of fear they [young children] don't want to come to the school. They become irregular in the school. But in the pre-primary level as there is learning through playing, like singing, rhyming, dancing, because of these they become very much interested to come to the class.

It appeared that participants considered play as the source of inspiration for learning and attraction for attending school.

CLASSROOM CONTEXT

Classroom contexts influence the play activities and learning of young children. To be particular, classroom environment and space arrangements are two of the important key elements to enhance young children's play in the classroom (Heidemann and Hewitt, 2010). Paradoxically, the studied schools lacked infrastructure and resources to support the pre-primary class. In school B and C the pre-primary class was usually conducted under the open sky without any facilities like black boards, bench-tables or sheds to protect the young children from the rain or the heat of the sun. In school A the class was temporarily conducted in a classroom designated for the primary students. In school D it was conducted in any available classroom. Unfavourable classroom environment hampered young children's learning and increased the possibility of non attendance at school. The tension of parent participants about the young children's learning due to the inadequate classroom situation is reflected in the following excerpts:

Rogina: They do not have enough rooms here. First three months they [young children] used to sit under the tree in the lawn outdoors. They also sit in the veranda. But as the rainy season arrived, they [teachers] managed a small room which lacks a proper ventilation system, and today as you can see this room is arranged by shifting other students to another room.

Fulbanu: They [young children] will get wet outside if it rains. ... they will think that it's raining today, I will get wet if I go to school, so I better stay at home. The weather can be too hot sometimes. If there are nice chairs and tables in the classroom then they will never miss their class.



Figure 6: A pre-primary class without classroom facilities in which the boundary wall is used to draw pictures/shapes

As instructed during the PPE training, teachers (Nasrin, Asma and Shathi) tried to made sitting arrangements for the children on mats, floor or ground in a U-shape or half circle facing towards the teacher . But according to them pre-primary classes did not have any allocated space but were held in available vacant rooms, verandas or even in the playgrounds.

Shathi: In the classroom there should be attractive seating arrangements for the children. It could be U-shaped so that everyone can see the teacher, or there can be desk tables. There should be racks to keep materials on. And there should be enough space. The room must be big enough so they can play freely. If the space is limited then they will be deprived of their desired learning environment, otherwise during play there will be chaos in the congested room.

Now we arrange the class outside, sometimes change the place of the classroom as the room is not fixed.

Due to lack of classroom facilities Nasrin conducts the pre-primary class in the playground and used the boundary wall as the alternative of blackboards to write, draw or explain something to the children (see Figure 6).

PLAY MATERIALS AND ACCESS

The literature provides evidence that play materials are of great significance in young children's learning and development . Nevertheless, this study reveals that in the classrooms young children had no access to challenging play materials that involve problem solving or decision making. The interviewed teachers considered above mentioned learning apparatuses, collected locally by them, as play materials. Again the number of these materials was not sufficient. In the following excerpts teacher participants admitted that due to lack of resources pre-primary classes lacked play materials and that ultimately

made the children disappointed.

Nasrin: ... in the primary level we don't have any budget for play way materials and it is really very difficult for us to collect them.

Shathi: ... every child wants to play at the same time. We manage this through making groups. But still there remain problems, while one group plays, children of other groups remain disappointed. For example, I can make 3 groups out of 30 children, but when one group plays, the remaining 20 children will be watching them; they will be disappointed naturally. Therefore, there should be enough materials.

Moreover, only in school D children had the opportunity to play outdoors with equipment like a swing, a slide and a seesaw, which were provided by an NGO. Absence of outdoor play equipment (in the rest of the schools), sharing the playground with high school children (school A, C, D) and construction of school buildings in School B's small playground limited young children's access to outdoor play in the respective schools.

Consequently, teacher and parent participants emphasised on the government's role to provide adequate play materials. Moreover, participants emphasised the necessity of culturally appropriate play materials.

Fulbanu: If the government wants to make this school a perfect school, they should provide different facilities, toys that would be really good [for the young children].

Asthma: They [government] should provide the required play and learning materials.

Shathi: We have to keep in mind that the play materials that our children usually play with should be included in learning. The play materials those are familiar to children, those which are appropriate in the context of our country, like small and light balls, dolls, toy animals or toy birds or small trains that children can watch moving.

TEACHERS' ROLE

Due to local pressure to accommodate all eligible (5 years old) children in most of the schools studied in the research, the number of pre-primary students exceeded the enrolment limit (that is 30 per class). All the teacher participants believed that the teacher-children ratio was not favourable to implement a playful and flexible curriculum to meet the needs of the children as outlined in the Operational Framework (MOPME, 2008). Parent participants also shared this perspective. The teachers remarked that the pre-primary class was prescribed by the government for 30 children (aged 4-5 years), but due to local communities' pressure in most of the schools, the number of student exceeded

the limit.

Shathi: We also allow children below that age [5 years], some are three and a half years old. ... We can't deny if a child comes to the school; we have to admit him/her.

Hence, ECE policies appeared to be inappropriate to address the social realities. This gap between policy and reality seemed to place the teachers in a dilemma while performing their responsibilities. To reduce tension and overcome possible dissatisfaction or a feeling of deprivation among young children Shathi and Rogina suggested for introducing a second shift of the pre-primary class. However, the teacher participants found it difficult to manage 30 or more young children single-handed in the classroom.

Shathi: It is difficult for me even to manage these young children to sit properly, or to keep them in a line for the national anthem, or for exercise. ... For another example, when I teach them how to do an exercise if I stand facing towards them they will be confused with the left and right hands' directions. If I face against them then they will be able to follow the left-right directions, but again in that case I'm unable to observe who is doing the exercise correctly and who is doing it in a wrong way.

To manage the lack of teaching assistance, Shathi engaged good students while Nasrin sometimes asked the members of the School Management Committee (SMC) or even the mothers for help.

Paradoxically, dual responsibilities to conduct pre-primary class and overcrowded primary classes appeared to hamper teachers' performance as EC teachers. This greatly influenced their classroom practices, and their attitudes towards the children.

Selina: ... in my class in grade 3 there are 117 students. It becomes troublesome to manage them. I can't teach them according to their needs. ... Since I'm a human being these situations create pressure on my mind. When I teach the young children in the baby [pre-primary] class all my concerns should be for them, how can young children do well, improve and enjoy. I've to think about that, about preparing the materials. So when I have to go to the upper class, and I can't take rest in between two classes, as I've continuous classes until 4:15 pm, it automatically creates pressure on me.

However, teachers implementing the newly adopted teaching method under the guidance of the PPE training and curriculum, appeared to be involved in interactive play activities with the young children as evident in Figure 1 and 2. The teachers also joined young children in singing songs, acting, doing physical exercises and playing games (see Figures 3 and 4). It also appears from the following excerpts that children enjoyed teachers' engagement in play activities.

Asma: There are sticks, seeds, marbles for counting and leaves ... I make a squirrel with leaves [laughing]. We've been trained so. This encourages the children. They feel like its fun. I make spectacles, snakes or watches with leaves. The children are not used to playing with sticks at home but many of them are well known to work with leaves. They also can make small boats, flowers or airplanes with colourful papers. They enjoy it and don't feel that this is a class. However, it appeared that young children choices were determined by the teachers. Shathi admitted that, while deciding the daily curriculum, she actually presented her own selections in such ways that children would claim them as their choices.

Shathi: To teach them 4 lines of a rhyme, I'll recite the whole rhyme to them. Then I'll ask them if they want to learn it today. I've to take their opinion. They express their opinion, actually they never deny [Laughing]. The parent participants appeared to appreciate the teachers' role in play-oriented teaching-learning system. But they relied on the teachers to decide what would be the best learning approach for their young children.

Johra: I like it [learning by playing], I like whatever and however they [teachers] are teaching.

DISCUSSION

PLAY AS A PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPT

Data analysis indicates that the way teachers and parents understood and classified play as teaching and learning was different to the classification and understanding of play used in many Western countries. In the present study participants used the terms 'games', 'sports', 'physical exercise', 'outdoor play', 'singing songs', 'rhyming', 'drawing pictures', 'acting' and 'working with learning apparatuses' to describe young children's play activities. In the educational settings play was interpreted as young children's active and interactive joyful activities with the teacher and peers as a means of developing academic skills through following the teacher's instructions. Hence, interpretations of educational play in the contexts of Bangladesh support that play as "characterized in Western theories is only one of many possible cultural models of children's play" (Goncu et al. 1999, as cited in Fler, Tonyan, Mantilla & Rivalland, 2009, p. 307). Besides, play is acknowledged as a source of motivation and attraction that may reduce young children's fear about school. The study reveals that the understandings of play and the nature of play practices in public ECE settings in semi-rural areas of Bangladesh are influenced by the existing socio-cultural, economic, political and educational contexts. However, it appears that the socio-cultural contexts of Bangladesh are not favourable for a non-tailored replication of a Western play based ECE

model.

CLASSROOM CONTEXTS

To facilitate young children's learning through play appropriately planned classrooms are essential. Bangladesh government's pre-school policy targets to provide a classroom of 250 square feet room for 30 young children, but it appeared in the study that the pre-primary classes were arranged in the available classrooms congested with benches and tables, or held in a veranda where there was not enough space for the children to sit properly on the floor or to move freely during play, or even in the playground where there is no protection from heat or rain. These classes lacked resources to support the play activities and learning of young children. Gupta (2011) argued that non-facilitated educational environments do not encourage the Western play practices. Similarly, despite the government policy to provide a playful teaching-learning classroom environment (DPE, 2010; MOPME, 2008) lack of infrastructural facilities and resources not only hindered the implementation of play method in the classroom, as evident in research conducted in India by Hedge and Cassidy (2009), but also discouraged young children from coming to the school.

ACCESS TO PLAY MATERIALS

Heidmann and Hewitt maintain that young children should be provided with opportunity to explore a range of stimulating and challenging props and materials that encourage diverse play activities. However, findings revealed that the young children did not have access to challenging play materials that encourage diverse play activities, or involve problem solving or decision making. Moreover, the number of existing play materials (learning apparatuses indeed) was not sufficient to allow all the children to explore, which increased dissatisfaction among them. This supports Heidemann and Hewitt's (2010) claim that inadequacy of play materials increases disruption. To promote young children's learning and development, Bilton (1998) and White (2008) argue for a planned outdoor space. But in the studied schools young children's access to outdoor plays was limited due to lack of resources.

TEACHERS' ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM AND RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN

At the institutional level it appears that the government policy was at odds with the expectations of the communities since the number of children in the pre-primary classes exceeded the government limit (30 children per class). This resulted in teaching practices in which teachers used to accommodate the

community needs rather than following government policy. The study conducted on Indian kindergartens argues that in the pre-primary class with 50-70 children it is not favourable to employ Western pedagogical approach (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). Similarly, in this study the teachers and parents felt that implementation of the play-oriented interactive teaching-learning system was subject to the number of children that the teacher can manage properly. Teachers' play practices in the classroom neither uphold child-centred play (Sandberg, 2002) nor expressed a balance between child-centred and teacher-directed approaches (Lobman, 2003). Rather, play as expressed by the participants in the present study was mostly teacher-directed or guided and children had little opportunity to choose activities that they like. It appears that play time was turned into structured learning time.

The teacher-children relationship indicated a different scenario in contrast to the traditional linear fashioned teaching-learning system. Incorporation of play method in the pre-primary level has facilitated teacher's active participation in children's play. It appears that the training provided by the government, as the institutional input, brought changes in teacher's perceptions and approaches towards children's play. However, huge group size of students, limited play materials and lack of resources are not favourable for the implementation of a play-based pedagogy (Hegde and Cassidy, 2009). In the present study it appears that despite these limitations teachers tried to incorporate play, more as joyful activities, to enhance young children's learning.

Findings indicated that interpretation of play and classroom practices were determined by factors like government policy, classroom environment, educational facilities, curriculum, teacher-children ratio, nature of play materials, access to play and teachers' role in children's play activities. Consequently, participants' conceptualisation of play as pedagogy appeared to be different from that of the Western understandings. Cannella maintains that the Western play approach lacks universal applicability as it is developed with certain values and biases to address the challenges of particular cultural realities. Gupta (2011) further argues that the Western way of defining play as pedagogy can be at odds with culturally different non-western classroom practices. This is reflected in the given context of the present study.

In this study play is described as joyful activities like working with learning apparatuses (such as bamboo sticks, leaves, stones, beads or bangles), singing, acting, rhyming, drawing or doing physical exercises. Teaching and learning is argued to be tailored and presented in a way which is appealing to the young children. In this regard, in an educational

environment without infrastructural facilities and adequate resources these teacher-directed activities provide the young children the opportunity to involve in joyful and interactive behaviours. This marked the difference with the traditional rote-oriented linear-fashioned teaching-learning method.

Besides, Vygotsky suggested that through play children do not merely reproduce reality, but also reinvent past experiences and develop their own knowledge. In the present study, however, it appears that in most cases children did not have the scope to create for themselves a meaningful context representing real life situations; rather the context was created by the teacher. They were not constructing their own understanding of knowledge; rather, they were learning how to do things in correct ways through imitating the teachers. Research asserts, “by focusing on only correct answers teachers may discourage playfulness in the classroom and often diminish creativity” .

However, the above-mentioned classroom activities mainly focused on the achievement and academic skills rather than exposing children to challenging activities that involve problem solving and decision making as advocated by Kieff and Casbergue. These were mostly teacher-directed or guided, and young children had little scope to express their choices which could make them intrinsically motivated to engage in play activities. However, in the Bangladesh context these teacher-directed activities were interpreted by the participants as having the power to accelerate young children's academic learning, for examples, literacy and numeracy.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that recognition and incorporation of play as pedagogy in formal ECE in the public sector of Bangladesh is subject to its socio-cultural and educational realities. Interpretations and incorporation of play as classroom practices referred to certain behaviours that provided a new dimension in understanding play, different from Western play perceptions. Thus the study argues for the need to reframe the concept of play and its practices to meet the socio-cultural, economic and political challenges of a non-Western developing country like Bangladesh.

The educational context appeared to encompass unfavourable classroom environment, limited access to play, absence of challenging play materials, scarcity of resources and lack of infrastructure. Despite these limitations, play was identified as joyful activities that involved young children in active and interactive behaviours with the teacher and peers as a way of developing academic skills through imitating the teacher's steps in a correct way. The play activities in the classroom were almost always teacher-directed or

were interpreted by the participants as having the power to accelerate young children's academic learning, such as literacy and numeracy. However, the existing policies and play practices provided a landmark in the ECE journey of Bangladesh through introducing a shift in the rote-learning based teaching tradition towards an interactive teaching-learning system. To meet the learning and developmental needs and rights of the non-privileged young children in rural Bangladesh this should be appreciated as the beginning of a new era in the ECE sector.

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