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Abstract

With support from play-based learning, there should be a clear understanding that play-based learning is a child-driven approach where children learn emphatically through play; teachers' participation is minimal. Even though there are great benefits accrued from play-based learning, there are concerns about how this approach can work in assessment strategies targeting the curriculum expectations (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015) and allotment of time to create and enrich the environment for play-based learning (Bennett et al., 1997).

This quantitative research examines tutors' pedagogical strategies to support play-based learning. Some simple questionnaires will be distributed to preschool teachers to know how they enhance play-based learning.

In addition, teachers involved in this research shared their concerns about play-based learning and exposed different teaching strategies they had implemented to be successful in casual interactions. The teachers recommended adopting professional development courses by giving appropriate teaching resources to define and understand the approaches for better execution.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Early childhood education puts play at heart with the positive intention to promote the quality of learning and development for children throughout their early years (Edwards, 2017). Given the power of play to support education,

teachers are showing a massive interest and support in how best play can be in a child's learning (Briggs & Hansen, 2012). Children value play because it provides great joy to explore nature as an element in their space to meet others and engage in sociable activities. Bennet et al. (1978) highlighted play as a way for children to retain information better when interacting with peers. Besides these benefits, teacher-directed play-based learning still takes charge in kindergarten proceedings because of its massive increase in curricula and policy expectations that challenge the lack of play and the need to support learning using developmentally appropriate methods; this situation has made it impossible for playful activities to occur.

The system has introduced young students to academics sooner because individuals choose academically based preschools. Hence, there is a reduced time to play actively in the classroom. In some preschool classes, technology replaces imaginary play that engages interactions with mates.

Morrison (2000) recommends providing opportunities for children to choose various learning activities with well-planned play areas to enhance learning experiences to succeed in emotional and social skills; play allows young learners to be critical thinkers and develop creativity through imagination skills (Clements & Fiorentino, 2004).

2. Literature Review

Play-based learning has generated much curiosity in classrooms, and teachers have encountered frustration and massive uncertainty in its implementation (Karia, 2014). This literature review focuses on gaining insight into teachers' pedagogical and experience strategies in play-based learning and examining its motive and usefulness in students' development.

Early childhood classrooms have recently become more academically focused than ever (Russell, 2011), with questions regarding play-based educational and developmental benefits for students (Ashiabi, 2007). The current education standards have focused on teaching academic skills as early as possible to maximise children's future (Miller & Almon, 2009). These standards have led to an increased focus on teacher-directed instruction (Ashiabi, 2007), with children being passive classroom knowledge recipients (Weisberg et al., 2013). As a result, the time spent in play-based learning has decreased tremendously, making children unstable socially and unable to play rigorously (Bergen, 2002).

Many of our scholars have debated how to define the concept of children's play, and there continues to be disagreement regarding what human actions are involved in this activity, why children engage in play, and how it impacts learning and development (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012).

Play-based learning involves child-centred elements, where children are fully engaged in learning through play with some degree of adult supervision with scaffolded objectives (Weisberg et al., 2013) to extend it further. Children can

naturally choose what they want to play to develop their confidence. If adults disrupt children's play, they tend to forget the information retained, making freedom meaningless and restricted. However, adults should intervene when necessary, like injury, or to know what the children are doing. Play and learning have a strong relationship and positively influence children's academics, specifically in language acquisition, numeracy, emotional skills, and problem-solving (Marcon, 2002).

Throughout memories, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who supported a child's happiness and development, agrees that through play, children can encourage themselves and work better on their strengths; Morrison (2007) commented, for instance, literacy embedded within play settings in classrooms reflects children's increased engagement with materials and practice of literacy skills (Stone & Christie, 1996), and teacher involvement further enhances the engagement to a successful end (Clark & Kragler, 2005).

In addition to the academic benefits of play, researchers have indicated a connection between the space and the development of social-emotional skills. For example, pretend play supports the children's self-regulation skills development (Berk & Meyers, 2013). Space allows children to apply new skills learned in different situations by encouraging flexibility and creativity, making learning enjoyable, and keeping children intrinsically motivated (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). An alternative perspective identifies play as a chance for children to internalise and explore academic concepts, where the teacher's involvement is an offer to

support children's learning and enrich the play by asking challenging questions (Pyle & Bigelow, 2014). This type of play-based learning is primarily effective as it engages the learner while the teacher implements directed elements. The need to encourage growth (Tal et al., 2008) and its development of a strong sense of well-being is supported through pleasure, freedom, and satisfaction experiences via play (Gordon et al., 2008). Early childhood learning and play cannot be separated, as child-driven play tends to be more effective than teacher-directed instruction (Chien et al., 2010).

Evidence confirms that child-driven play benefits socio-emotional development (Ashiabi, 2007), while more teacher-directed space is considered for academic development skills (Tsao, 2008). This dichotomisation of play-based learning combined with the perspective of learning and play as different constructs in the classroom environment (Pramling et al., 2006) compounds the difficulties faced by educators who report confusion between preferred instructional practices and mandated curricula (Martlew et al., 2011). To facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of integrating play-based learning practices and methods in the classrooms, the level of teachers' involvement, roles, environment, and pedagogies aim to develop and define a broader way of play-based learning in early childhood.

In light of this, Wood and Attfield (2005) anticipated that individuals see childhood as a form of immature nature of adulthood, but studies of classical play theorists Dewey, Rousseau, Froebel, and others manage to change the perception

towards children's freedom to participate, guidance and nurturing, according to Platz and Arellano (2011).

Furthermore, theorist Vygotsky (1978), a constructivist who supported play-based learning, believed that knowledgeable individual(s) can help children achieve their potential as play motivates them to explore and learn skills for their everyday experiences. He stated that children bring reality into play by setting rules, roles, and behaviours that help work on their proximal development zone by someone knowledgeable to move beyond their daily skills and experiences.

Bruner (1983) also supports play-based learning; he acknowledges that encouraging children to explore different activities freely through trial and error creates intentional inventions with new goals and ideas for themselves. Bruner recommended that play is where children take from their environment and practice to broaden their existing knowledge.

2.1 Teachers' role and strategies used in a play-based learning environment.

Many research and theories have supported the pedagogy and purpose behind a play-based learning environment (Piaget, 1936). Hence, implementing a play-based learning environment and the teacher's role has brought much practice of doubt and mistrust (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). With the strategy of following the child's natural learning progression, teachers promote teaching and its application with some degree of guidance from an adult (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). However, teacher involvement and assistance with caution to support the best practices but

not disturb is acceptable (Pramling et al., 2016, p.48). Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, and Tenenbaum (2011) agree with this perspective that unassisted discovery generally does not benefit or progress learning (p.12). Therefore, educators craft how their learning environment and experiences best impact a child's learning process (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Independence should be given to children to choose what they want to play with; since play is a self-directed activity, the child will figure out what is best, but rules and routines that lead them are appropriate. However, when the rules are not adhered to, the teacher has the right to see that everyone involved is safe because rules help children control their impulses in play, as Vygotsky (1978) emphasised.

Also, observing children's play while taking notes on what the child is exhibiting during play gives many impressions and ideas on how best to plan lesson activities to encourage and maximise the learning process. Griffing's (1982) point of view is that observing children's play gives ideas on activities they usually use, for instance, the time needed for the space, how they relate to peers and how best they can be safeguarded regarding rough play.

Additionally, teachers' involvement in early childhood is vital in promoting children's play to become a success, highlighted by Tarman (2011). Parents can rest assured that the support children receive to be productive will depend on the quality of play they receive during their early years. When teachers and adults get involved, it enhances the children's intellectual minds and purposefully enriches

their locomotor skills. The reason is that teachers know how to put into their schedule to maximise learning potential and well-being, as Johnson (2005) suggested.

Children's pretend play area can be theme-related costumes, notebooks, pencils, cash registers, tables, chairs, and many more to create a world where pre-scholars can express their natural behaviour and play as they use some of the equipment. Teachers are always making sure that the equipment and materials will positively help the child's life as he takes on his first immediate adventure outside the home while in school, as Sponseller (1974) suggested.

In Zigler's (2004) point of view, teachers should be onlookers who watch and listen when play is in progress. They observe when, how, and who needs intervention assistance to get clues about the children's interests. Typically, teachers sit near the play area but not inside to make verbal comments, non-verbal signs, and smiles to make the children aware that they see and know what they are doing. An example of an onlooker role: A group of girls played, and Anna took a bowl and picked one banana and avocado. She then started cutting the fruits. Mrs James, the teacher, saw what Anna tried to do and asked, "What are you doing? Anna replied It is fruit salad. The teacher asked what other fruits she could add to make her fruit salad delicious. She said, raspberries. Mrs James asked who would enjoy the fruit salad. Anna mentioned Mom, Dad, John and all her friends as she smiled and busily continued with her actions. In this way, Mrs.

James intervenes to get to know Anna's intentions by asking her questions to understand what she is doing.

2.2 Purpose of the study

This research topic examined the pedagogical strategies educators use to support play-based learning. Considering this research, understanding the process will coordinate and assist teachers in feeling more comfortable and confident in providing more support in children's education. Teachers have agreed that play is essential to learners' development (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015) and allows them to practice skills and implement the knowledge learned in various situations. However, most educators are unsure of the environment for play-based learning (Martlew et al., 2011). To eliminate teachers' stress and frustration, plans on how to teach play-based are a better way of getting the teachers to understand the play-based procedure and its benefits for learners.

3. Methodology

In this section, the researcher used a quantitative approach to gather information by structuring questions related to play-based learning and inquiry from British School of Bahrain teachers. The questions involve ticking the preferred option. For example, agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree and some observations on how happy children were when play-based is in action.

3.1 Research Questions

These questions were structured and handed out to the teachers to read and provide their choices.

1. Does play-based learning support children's overall growth and development?
2. Will it be effective if teachers combine instructional teaching with child's play when the excitement of sport becomes massive?
3. Is it appropriate for the teachers to be knowledgeable in types of play to strategise lessons?
4. Is it problematic for teachers to teach in a play-based learning environment without experience?
5. Does the teacher's involvement in children's play promote learning and development?
6. Does equipping the environment with enrichment and ensuring children's safeguards help play-based learning?

3.2 Participants

The teachers I encountered were ten, aged from twenty-four to forty-seven, and had been teaching four- to five-year learners with experience ranging from two to ten years. Confirmation was made to Participants that the information taken was for academic use and would be treated as confidential, as Tracy (2010) recommended.

4. Data Analysis

The data had impressive support for play-based learning as they strongly agreed to all the questions except question four, which disagreed with all after collecting questionnaires.

In Ms Christy's classroom, I had the chance to be with her for two hours as I observed her in the classroom. The classrooms were elegantly clean and sections into a books corner, an arts and crafts amusement, a playground with modern equipment, a modelling corner with different types of costumes and a sensory garden where one can find play dough, different types of coloured rice, sand, dolls, building blocks and many more. She was very enthusiastic and attentive to the children's needs. She was inclusive in their play, asked questions, and drew attention to details to make play meaningful and safe.

Also, I recognised that she communicated in simple English during circle time for them to understand. We read a story about a lazy dog and a cat.

This story made the children laugh because she simultaneously changed her voice to that of a dog barking and a cat.

She asked questions to see if they were listening. After circle time, it was time for free play. We all moved to the shaded playground, where the children collaborated with their friends and began using their favourite equipment. Physically, some of the kids could not climb to the go-round circle, so the assistant teacher helped them. We spent about thirty minutes at the playground after she put a puppet on her hand with a voice-over to sing a clean-up song; they

immediately sang along to put items in place because balls were all over the place. She emphasised singing whilst cleaning together, symbolising a community of bonding, learning, and fun as routined.

Again, during snack time, I casually talked with Ms Christy about why having experience and training before teaching in a play-based learning environment is essential. She made me understand that when teaching young children, we need to be aware of their learning capabilities and provide a safe environment, which can be accomplished through observations (Schindler, 2010) because it is a form of assessing learners along with portfolios that details children's accomplishments and indicate as a tool for the teacher to write a vivid report of the child. It can include photos and observation notes on student progress and work samples.

Again, project-based learning allows students to be involved in projects that bring in the knowledge they learned during a unit and demonstrate it to their loved ones, highlighted by Schindler (2010). She continued that this procedure allows learners to feel engaged with curriculum expectations by providing different materials for students' experiences to connect learning to practical skills.

Furthermore, she gave an instance that teachers should be aware that children learn in abilities, so it will be appropriate to introduce a differentiated instructional approach where teachers accommodate and modify teaching to support and maintain diverse academic needs (Grant et al., 2010) in terms of content meaning, materials and goals provided for the learners as well as

considering small group, on how best children can demonstrate learning through a product (Guillaume, 2012).

In addition, she included that classroom routines should be established efficiently and firmly, as Diamond (2008) agreed. She states that teachers are held accountable for children's learning environment in a play-based classroom and must take care of it. She suggested that teachers should portray appropriate behaviour in terms of classroom settings. Although Karia (2014) stated that play-based learning has a small structure, it has pros due to its open-ended way. It allows teachers to be involved in trial and error to construct new knowledge and ideas for teaching. So, with all these techniques, approaches, and experiences, if a teacher is not well trained to capture these facts, it will not be easy to understand the concept of play-based and its application.

5. Conclusion

Children think and learn differently, and building young minds needs an entertaining environment to capture attention. Play is an acceptable strategy for developing creativity and curiosity. Therefore, educators should be patient and accommodating when designing play-based learning to support children's needs (Mooney, 2000, p.23). According to Montessori, the environment helps develop potential skills as it persuades to create something meaningful through the well-planned structure of the school. However, rearrangements in maintenance help

revamp the learning environment as children learn best through repetition and doing (Mooney, 2000, p.29).

Again, the time to play is minimal and does not help accomplish daily tasks in a setting; teachers give up control and maintain a flexible position in their classroom, where clarity allows more control over what can boost the children's academic learning within their uninterrupted play (Mooney, 2000, p.29).

Moreover, there should be clarity about integrating guided play strategies into teaching methodologies. For instance, in a teacher's lesson plan, play limits the regulation due to the school's physical environment; the selection of materials and adult involvement might take the slack out of work for learning purposes. Therefore, career advancement is employed to educate the teachers to execute confidently without complications.

Lastly, children appreciate relationships; being outdoors and communicating with objects permit them to play in various ways to fulfil a vital responsibility development, such as self-regulation and social skills. However, teachers should allow children to choose activities to enable them to reflect on learning in play to reduce dichotomy recreation.

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