

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY APPROACH ACCORDING TO THEIR SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS AT SELECTED INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract: The purposes of this study was to identify demographic profiles of the teachers, to determine teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach at selected international schools in Bangkok and to compare teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach from their practice of early years based on their nationalities, years of teaching experience and qualification specialty in 2016. From the total number of 170 preschool and kindergarten teachers working at 17 selected international schools in Bangkok; 93 teachers completed the survey. Statistical measures employed in this study included frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation and independent samples t-test. The results of this study has indicated that overall teachers had positive perspectives towards the learning through play approach. There were no significant differences of teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach according to their nationalities and years of teaching experience; however, the researcher discovered that there were significant differences of teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach according to their qualification specialty. Teachers with education degree had more positive perspectives towards the learning through play approach than the teachers with non-education degree

Key Words: Teachers' perspectives, Learning through play approach, Selected Demographics: Nationalities, Years of teaching experience and Qualification specialty.

Introduction

Learning begins at birth (Haddad, Colletta, Fisher, Lakin & Sutton, 1990). The idea that children only learn by going to a school has been replaced by the fact and growing understanding of the people that learning begins at birth itself. Perspective is a process of believing and viewing the world around. Richardson (1996) found that it is important to know the teachers' thought process with regards to play as it affects their perception and judgments which shows a simultaneous effect on their behavior in the classroom. Thai educational system has been facing several challenges since 1999. The primary challenges in Thai education system are unsatisfactory curricula, the outdated teaching methods, inadequate quality of teachers. The primary focus is on the academic achievements of the child. The amount of play in kindergarten classrooms seems to be declining. There are various pedagogies involved with Early Years Learning Framework which are holistic approach, responsiveness to children, learning environment, intentional teaching, cultural competence and learning through play. Among these the key element for early childhood learning is play based learning ad claimed by (Kennedy & Barblett, 2010). Play is a spontaneous activity which the children inherit naturally regardless of their culture. It is an "enjoyable", "intrinsically motivated" and "process oriented" activity (Ahn, 2008). Moving towards 21st century the educational needs have changed. Practicing play based learning in kindergarten classroom has become vital. "Without play, learning and evolution are impossible" (Nachmanovitch, 1989). In order to understand a child one must understand his play. Through play children learn culture and express themselves which makes them psychologically strong.

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Research Objectives

There were three objectives for this study as follows:

1. To identify the demographic factors of the teachers including age, nationalities, years of teaching experience and qualification specialty?
2. To determine teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their practice for early years at selected international schools in Bangkok?
3. To compare teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach from their practice for early years based on their nationalities, years of teaching experience and qualification specialty?

Literature Review

Ideology and Principles of Early Childhood Education Provision

The ideology of early childhood education provision is to offer fundamental education to Thai children that allow suitable development which are physically, emotionally, mentally, socially and intellectually. Children should be given activities that promote brain development and prepare them for elementary education. The early childhood education focuses on development of children with accordance to the nature, culture, civilization and social ways of life (Bureau of Education Testing, Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, 2012).

- *Principle of Holistic Child Development:* this covers the overall development of a child from healthy body to stimulated mind. Children should be given social training where they learn to interact socially with the people in the community and happily live with others representing their Thai culture.
- *Principle of Child-Centered Management of Experience:* it is the implementation of rearing and training with love, care and executing learning through playing and other stimulating activities. Learning should be fun and self – directed by the child.
- *Principle of Thainess Promotion:* consist of cultivating the Thai nationality, following the Thai culture, respecting parents and considering the king as the center model in life
- *Principle of Collaboration:* among educational institution, communities and families in developing the children to lead a daily life with quality and preparing them for elementary education in the future (Bureau of Education Testing, Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, 2012).

Classical Theories of Play

The Surplus Energy Theory

This theory was founded by Aristotelian philosophy of catharsis, and later developed by Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). According to surplus energy theory all living things including human and animals produce sufficient energy to meet their needs for survival. When they produce more than what is needed, extra or “surplus” it is eliminated through play. As studied in this theory, play benefits by getting rid of the “surplus” energy that is left over after meeting the basic survival needs. According to Herbert Spenser (1820-1903) a British philosopher believed that during childhood living organism develop uncontrollable desire to play which is considered as superfluous activity. Younger species tend to have higher surplus energy as they are dependent on their parents for longer period of time. Given that the organisms are dependent on their parents less of their energy is used for survival and more energy is freed for play. Spenser’s surplus energy theory is fused with play and survival of human species (Saracho & Spodek , 1995

Relaxation Theory

Moritz-Lazarus (1883) a German poet identified the relaxation or recreational theory. This theory is exactly the opposite of surplus energy theory. In relaxation theory, play is the medium to obtain energy. Play serves to revitalize or replenish energy used in the work; it doesn’t drain off excess or surplus energy. Since play is the inverse of work it can easily replace the energy used in the work. In this theory play is considered as a recreational activity (Saracho & Spodek , 1995).

Pre-exercise Theory

Developed by Karl Groos (1896). He developed this theory when the child- study movement was progressing. He made observations and comprehended the play activities to see the development of children in more scientific way. Gross made categories to identify the function of child's play. The categories included experimental play (games with rules); rough and tumble play; and imitative, social and family game. Play helps to boost role that allows children to prepare for their future. This view of play relates to constructivist theories in which play is an important tool in developing children's intellectual intelligence (Saracho & Spodek , 1995).

Modern Theories of Play

Cognitive development theory

Jean Piaget's child cognitive development theory, it focuses on cognitive development of a young child over a period of time. Play is a very important vehicle for normal physical, social and cognitive development. Jean Piaget related the series of development stages of play to his theory of the cognitive development in children.

- The first stage sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years old) when children try to understand their own bodies and the external objects, also called the "practice play" which involves repeated patterns, movements, sounds and the objects are made to repeatedly disappear and appear. With time children begin to realize the effect of play in their environment.
- The second stage is preoperational stage (2-7years) when children associate the objects with words. The children start getting involved in make- believe game by using the objects for purpose other than their intended function.
- The third stage is the concrete operational stage (7-11years) when children use logic and start categorizing activities and start following game rules. By the fourth stage the formal operations stage (12 years and higher), children involve in competitive games and emerge with maturity (McLeod, 2015)

Social development theory

Lev Vygotsky's social development theory shows how young children develop from social interaction around them which enhances their cognitive development. Under this theory the two main components which are the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2007).

Play as sensory learning

According to Maria Montessori children need sensory experience to learn and grow (North American Montessori Center, 2010). The sensory experience begins at birth as the children use their senses to understand the environment. Playing with sensory materials children learn to classify things which leads to child making his own experience in the environment.

Conceptual Framework

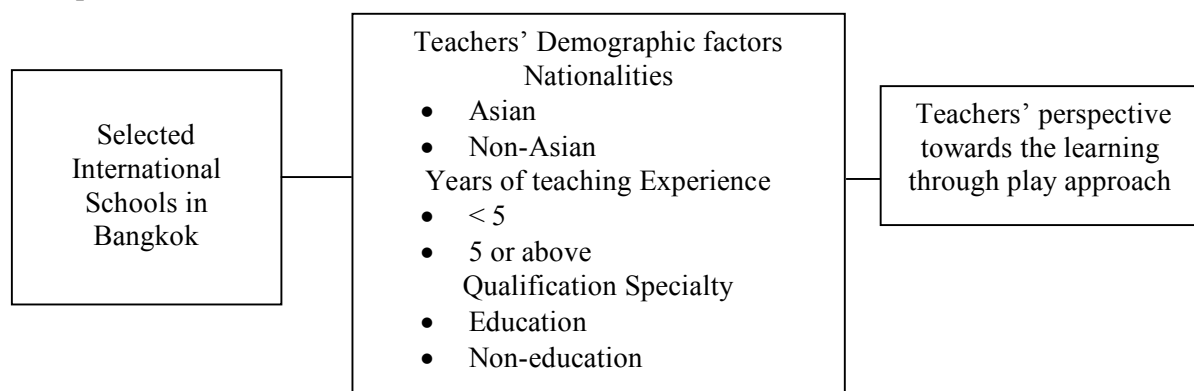


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of this study.

Research Instrument

The research was a quantitative study using both descriptive and comparative methods to understand teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their practice for early years at selected 17 international schools in Bangkok.

The questionnaire was mainly based on the literature review of the play from Puteh and Ali (2013), Haney and Bissonnette (2011) to compare teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach from their practice of early years based on their nationalities, years of teaching experience and qualification specialty.

The questionnaire also adopted research of Powell (2010). In the questionnaire, Section A was used to determine pre-school and kindergarten teachers' demographics, including their *Age*, *Nationalities*, *Years of teaching experience*, *Qualification*, *Qualification specialty*. Section B was used to measure the teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach.

Population

This study was conducted in 17 international schools in Bangkok in the 1st term of the academic year 2016-2017. All 170 pre-school and kindergarten teachers were the target population. A total of 170 questionnaires were distributed and 93 questionnaires were completed and returned.

Findings

From the analysis of data, the findings were as follows:

For Research Objective One

Age of the teachers. Table 1 shows the age groups of the teachers. 28 teachers were in age the group 36+ (30.1%), 25 teachers were in age group the 26-30 (26.9%), 23 teachers were in age group 31-35 (24.7%) and 17 teachers were in the age group 20-25 (18.3).

Table 1: Age groups of the teachers

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	17	18.3
26-30	25	26.9
31-35	23	24.7
36+	28	30.1
Total	93	100

Nationalities of the Teachers. Table 2 shows the nationalities of the teachers. Among all the teachers 59 teachers were Asians (59%) and 34 teachers were Non-Asian (36.6%)

Table 2: Nationalities of the teachers

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Asian	59	63.4
Non-Asian	34	36.6
Total	93	100

Years of Teaching Experience of the teachers: Table 3 shows years of teaching experience of the teachers. 39 teachers had less than 5 years (41.9%) of teaching experience and 54 teachers had more than years (58.1%) of teaching experience.

Table 3: Years of Teaching Experience of teachers

Years of teaching experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 years	39	41.9
5 years or above	54	58.1
Total	93	100

Qualification Specialty of the Teachers: Table 4 shows the proportion of qualification specialty of teachers. 63 teachers had an education degree (67.7%) and 30 teaching had a non-education degree (32.3%).

Table 4: Qualification Specialty

Education Background	Frequency	Percentage
Education Degree	63	67.7
Non-education Degree	30	32.3
Total	93	100

Research Objective Two

Table 5 shows teachers' perspective towards the learning through play approach based on their practice. The mean score of teachers' perspective towards learning through play approach was 3.87 which was at "Positive" range as referred to the Interpretation Table.

Table 5: Mean Score of Teachers' Perspectives towards the Learning through Play Approach

Perspective	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Perspective towards Learning through Play Approach	3.87	0.422	Positive

Research Objective Three

Table 6 indicates the results from independent sample t-test between the Asian and Non-Asian teachers' perspective score. The P-value .273 was more than .05, which means there was no significant differences in teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their nationalities.

Table 6: Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives According to their Nationalities.

Nationality	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Asian	59	3.84	.46	91	-1.1	.273
Non-Asian	34	3.94	.33			

Table 7 shows the results from independent sample t-test between teachers with less than 5 years and 5 years or more teaching experience. The P-value .695 was more than .05, which mean there was no significant differences of the teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their years of teaching experience.

Table 7: Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives according to their Years of Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Less than 5 years	39	3.85	.44	91	-.153	.695
5 years or above	54	3.89	.40			

Table 8 indicates the results from independent sample t-test between teachers with Education degree and Non-education degree. As shown in the table probability significance was .00, which is less than .05. The research hypothesis was accepted, hence there were significant differences in teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their qualification specialty.

Table 8: Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives according to their Qualification Specialty

Qualification	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Education degree	63	3.95	.05	91	2.74	.00
Non-education degree	30	3.71	.06			

Discussion

The Demographic Factors

The age group of the teachers ranging from the most to the least were 36+, 26-30, 31-35 and 20-25. For nationalities, the total number of Asian teachers were more than the Non-Asian teachers. For the years of teaching experience, there were more teachers who had 5 or above years of experience. For education specialty, teachers with education degree were more than teachers with non-education degree.

According to the statements from the head teachers of the selected 17 international schools in Bangkok, the schools prefer to hire teachers with at least 2 years of teaching experience, qualified with an education degree as this helps in teaching, learning and child development. An education degree can support the teachers to understand how children learn, grow and pedagogies of teaching. This is the reason why majority of the participants who worked in the international schools had an education degree and 5 or more years of teaching experience. In most of the international schools in Bangkok if a person is qualified with master's in education they can hold a position of a pre-school or a kindergarten teachers. Since many of the Asian teachers had 5 or more years of teaching experience and had an education degree it is likely that the school choose to hire more Asian teachers which resulted in higher Asian nationalities in this study.

Teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their practice for early years

According to the findings of the study teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their practice for early years was positive. Specifically there were top three items were "positive". The items were "Music and songs are activities not only used for play" (Item 4); "Play is how children learn about the world around them". (Item 8); "Learning does not only take place during the quiet environment of circle time". (Item 14). Three items were at "Neutral": "Early years learners learn best when they are allowed to do whatever they want". (Item 5); "Watching children play is a way to tell how smart there are". (Item 6); "Learning should not be teacher directed" (Item 17).

All the teacher participants held a positive perspectives towards the learning through play approach as it contributed to child's learning and development. Play benefited in child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains (Peng, 2011). The teachers believed that learning and play are the same things and that children should be allowed to play at most times. They also believed that music and songs are the best medium for play. In addition teacher participants felt that play contributed to social skills and knowledge acquirement such as learning to work with others, communication skills, perspective – taking, sense of confidence and self-esteem. In regards to teachers' perspectives on the benefits of play, "play is how children learn about the world around them"; had the highest mean score, this was similar to Lev Vygotsky's belief "through play children make sense of the world around them and work through new experiences, ideas, and feelings" (Farr, 2014).

The item 5 "Early years learners learn best when they are allowed to do whatever they want"; had the lowest mean as teachers were not sure if learning should be based on free play entirely. According to Montessori children should be given freedom within limits. Children should have the flexibility to make their own choices about the work to engage in whether to do collaboratively or individually. Freedom does not mean that children can do whatever they like; rather they should be encouraged to think independently and act as a member of social group (Modern Montessori International Group, 2011). This could be reason why teacher were entirely sure about item 5. The item 6 "Watching children play is a way to tell how smart they are"; was rated neutral as teachers believed that watching children play could help understand their play cognitive process, the ways they get frustrated, their tolerance level, their curiosity creative responses. Play helps in development of intelligent level, but does not determine how smart a child is (Lillard et al., 2012).

Teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach based on their nationalities, years of teaching experience and qualification specialty

The results of the research showed that there were no significant differences in teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach from their practice for early years at selected 17 international schools in Bangkok based on their nationalities and years of teaching experience. However, there were significant differences in teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play

approach from their practice for early years at selected 17 international schools in Bangkok based on their qualification specialty.

The qualification specialties included in this study were education degree and non-education degree. There were significant differences on the teachers' perspectives towards the learning through play approach from their practice for early years based on their qualification specialty. It was noticeable that teachers with education degree had higher perspective towards learning through play approach compared to the teachers with non-education degree. It is possible that teachers with education degree are more likely to learn about the relationship of play and development in their course work which influences their perspective. An education degree provides context rich experience such as independent projects associated with advance coursework or continuing education and real-life teaching experience which helps teachers construct knowledge of their students (Haney & Bissonnette, 2011). Teacher with education degree are more likely to possess pedagogical skills and take more facilitative role in the classroom with regards to play and child development (Puteh & Ali, 2013). The above reasons contribute to teachers with an education degree having a positive perspectives towards the learning through play approach.

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