

**THE USE OF PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES AMONG PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN
THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE) PRESCHOOLS IN THEIR TEACHING**

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES AMONG PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE) PRESCHOOL IN THEIR TEACHING

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This study aimed to look at the use of play-based activities among 20 preschool teachers in 12 different Ministry of Education (MoE) preschools in Kuching divisions. The investigation was analyzed into three areas; the type of play-based activities used by the preschool teachers in their teaching where the chosen play-based activities were categorized based on Smilansky's (1968) four types of play activities; the reasons for using the selected play-based activities and the type of retention activities given to the preschoolers. This study used the ideas proposed by Maria Montessori (1906) where she believed that children should be taught through the use of activities that can stimulate their learning interest. Meanwhile Jean Piaget (1962) believed that through play-based activities, children who aged between four to six were able to assimilate and accommodate the taught knowledge and skills. The combination of direct observation and semi-structured interview questions were used to gather the data. The direct observation looked at the activities used by the preschool teachers, the subject matter taught, the ways preschool teachers gathered preschoolers' attention, the responses given by preschoolers and the selected retention activities used by the preschool teachers. While the semi-structured interview questions were used to get preschool teachers' reasons for using the selected play-based activities. From the findings gathered, 15 out of 20 activities carried out by the preschool teachers were defined as play-based activities such as coloring activities, manipulation of colored papers and physical activities. Three ways usually used by preschool teachers to gather preschoolers' attention were: by directly calling the preschoolers' names, through the use of questions and non-verbal responses such as touching the preschoolers' shoulders, hand clapping and hand waving. Five reasons why preschool teachers used the selected play-based activities had been identified: related to the subject matter taught, suitable for the preschoolers' ages and abilities, memorization, developing preschoolers' language development, and enhancing preschoolers' muscle and eye coordination. Three type of retention activities commonly given to preschoolers to enhance what preschoolers had learnt: tasksheets, workbooks, and other types of play-based activity. In conclusion, the use of a play-based activity is one of the alternatives that provide fun learning for preschoolers to learn what had been taught to them.

ABSTRAK

PENGGUNAAN AKTIVITI BERASASKAN PERMAIANAN OLEH GURU-GURU PRASEKOLAH DI PRASEKOLAH KEMENTERIAN PELAJARAN DI DALAM PENGAJARAN

Teo Fang Liang

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui amalan penggunaan aktiviti berasaskan permainan yang dipilih dan diguna oleh 20 orang guru prasekolah di 12 prasekolah kementerian pelajaran di daerah Kuching. Penyelidikan ini telah dianalisa kepada tiga bahagian iaitu; jenis-jenis aktiviti berasaskan permainan yang dipilih dan diguna oleh guru-guru prasekolah dalam pengajaran mereka iaitu berasaskan klasifikasi aktiviti berasaskan permainan yang dikemukakan oleh Smilansky (1968), sebab atau alasan memilih aktiviti berasaskan permainan tersebut dan jenis-jenis aktiviti tambahan (pengukuhan dan pengayaan) yang diberikan kepada para pelajar prasekolah. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendapat yang dikemukakan oleh Maria Montessori (1906) yang berpendapat aktiviti yang diberikan kepada mereka haruslah berasaskan kepada aktiviti-aktiviti yang digemari oleh kanak-kanak. Sebegitu juga dengan Jean Piaget (1962) yang berpendapat melalui aktiviti berasaskan permainan, para pelajar prasekolah dapat menggabungkan (asimilasi) pengetahuan baru dengan pengalaman yang sedia ada dan membentuk satu konsep atau pengetahuan yang baru. Dalam usaha mengumpul data-data yang berkaitan, kombinasi rakaman dan temuduga separuh struktur telah diguna. Sesi rakaman yang dijalankan bertujuan melihat lima aspek iaitu mata pelajaran yang diajar, aktiviti yang digunakan di dalam pengajaran, cara para guru prasekolah menarik perhatian para pelajar prasekolah, reaksi yang diberikan oleh para pelajar prasekolah dan aktiviti-aktiviti tambahan yang diberikan kepada pelajar prasekolah. Manakala temuduga separuh struktur bertujuan untuk mengumpul data yang berkaitan dengan sebab-sebab para guru prasekolah menggunakan aktiviti-aktiviti permainan di dalam pengajaran mereka. Melalui hasil dapatan yang diperolehi, terdapat 15 daripada 20 aktiviti-aktiviti yang dijalankan oleh para guru prasekolah diklasifikasikan sebagai aktiviti-aktiviti berasaskan permainan misalnya, mewarna, pendidikan jasmani dan memanipulasikan kertas-kertas berwarna. Tiga cara yang biasa diguna oleh para guru prasekolah untuk menarik perhatian para pelajar prasekolah; memanggil nama pelajar, menyoal dan penggunaan bukan bahasa contohnya menyentuh bahu, tepukkan tangan dan lambaian tangan. Lima sebab tentang aplikasi aktiviti-aktiviti berasaskan permainan yang diberikan oleh para guru sekolah merangkumi ketepatan dengan komponen-komponen yang diajar, kesuaian dengan peringkat umur dan kebolehan para pelajar prasekolah, merangsang keupayaan untuk mengingat pengetahuan yang diajar, meningkatkan kemajuan berbahasa dan menguatkan koordinasi mata dan tangan. Manakala tiga aktiviti-aktiviti tambahan yang biasa diberikan kepada para pelajar; lembaran kertas kerja, buku latihan dan aktiviti-aktiviti berasaskan permainan yang lain. Secara kesimpulannya, penggunaan aktiviti-aktiviti berasaskan permainan merupakan satu alternatif yang memberikan keseronokan kepada para pelajar prasekolah di dalam mempelajari pengetahuan yang diajar kepada mereka.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PT/TR	=	Preschool teacher
PSCR	=	Preschooler
MOE	=	Ministry of Education

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter overview

This study attempted to explore the use of play-based activities among preschool teachers in teaching the kindergarteners in the Ministry of Education (MoE) kindergartens. Thus, this chapter discusses on the historical perspectives on the use of play, the background of the study, the statement of problem, the research objectives, the research questions, the significance of the study, the operational definition of the key terms, the scope of the study and the chapter review

1.1 Introduction: The history of play

Play has been used since ancient civilization to help children to understand the phenomena, events, concepts, and social environments (Shipley, 2002). During this period, by involved the students with play the adult could observe to understand the children better. During the Renaissance and reformation periods, toys were used in considerations to prepared the children with adulthood stage and as the children' learning tools as long as it was pleasurable (Shipley, 2002). While in the early

20th century, most of the prominent philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Susan Isaac and John Dewey found that plays were able to address all aspects of children' development (Shiple, 2002).

The study on the use of play activities among students continued later on in the 20th century as most of the philosophers like Jean Piaget, for instance found that by using play activities children constructed their knowledge and understanding through learning by doing (Shiple, 2002). The possible reason of Piaget's finding is because, through the use of play, learning is made more meaningful and memorable to children as they actively engaged in play activity (learning by doing). This supported by Essa (1992), as she stated that based on Piaget's theory on children' development, play enabled the children to assimilate their experiences with their learning without trying hard to adapt to the reality. This is crucial during the preoperational period when children aged between 2 to 8 years old. Through these findings, it showed that play assisted children to construct new knowledge as it enabled children to have opportunity to engage their prior experiences with their current learning. Using play activities children were given opportunity to socialize and interact with each other once they are involved in cooperative play activities. As argued by Jones (2001, cited in Broadhead, 2004) children could extend their personal understanding on their learning if they are involved in the investigations, explorations and interactions activity. Thus, socialization enabled the children to scaffold their learning experiences with other children' learning experiences.

Through these development and findings on the use of play, it is obvious that play-based activity is considered as one of the essential and prominent activities or tools used to teach kindergarten students. Besides, it is used to assist the pre-education students to construct knowledge and learning on the subject matter taught in fun and meaningful ways. According to Broadhead (2006), play activities could address and

impede children' progress since it is influenced by the play activities' qualities and availability. Although integrating play-based activities in daily teaching is not a compulsory matter, however, play-based activities nowadays should not be seen as something for children just to play with but as a tool to prepare the kindergarteners into their adulthood stage. Adulthood stage here refers to the stage once the students are prepared to enter the primary school. Nevertheless, play should not be seen as the substitute of the preschool teachers' roles but, as a tool or activity to help them to assist their children' learning aspects.

1.2 Background of the study

Play-based activity is one of the essential tools used to teach preschoolers with their learning (Shipley, 2002). She pointed that play activities are able to provide children with a joyful learning. In other words, play-based activities were able to provide rich encouragement towards the children' learning as they learn through fun. In the national preschool curriculum specification, using the play-based activities among preschool teachers' learning and teaching processes is associated with the "learning through play" approach. "Learning through play" approach is one of the approaches recommended by the ministry of education in the MoE preschools. This approach is used to develop the kindergarteners' creativity, cognitive, spiritual and moral values, physical growth and socio emotional development (National Preschool Curriculum, 2001). In this study, the terms 'children', 'preschoolers' and "kindergarteners" were used synonymously and refer to the same age and level of individual that is the kindergarten students.

This study looked in depth teachers' selection of play-based activities and the teachers' purposes for using play-based activities in their teaching. In addition, this study does not intent to observe the kindergarteners' development in learning through

play but to seek the answers on why using the particular play activity to teach the preschoolers. Nevertheless, this study is guided by philosophy related to how children in kindergartens learn best and focus a bit on Piaget's theory of children's development through the use of play. Besides, play activities do not exist in single aspect but can be categorized into two domains namely, indoor and outdoor plays. However, Smilansky (1968, cited in Beaty, 1990) categorized play activities into four types that are functional play, constructive play, dramatic play, and games with rules. They are categorized based on Piaget's theory as he believed that a child's play is influenced by cognitive development.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Learning through play is one of the recommended approaches to be used by preschool teachers in the Ministry of Education (MoE) kindergartens. The approach aims to provide the kindergarteners with fun yet meaningful learning experience, which can avoid kindergarteners' boredom and tense in learning process. However, not all classrooms or outdoors activities can be considered as play-based activities although they seem similar. For instance, if the teacher were to just ask the students to do coloring activity without teaching the students about colors and ways to color particular picture using appropriate color and techniques, this does not seem like play-based activity, although the students can be having fun through the activity. This is because in this research, play-based activities are the activities that are believed could develop the kindergarteners' learning. For instance, when a kindergarten teacher is teaching the students on plants or flowers and the use of water to plants, the kindergarten teacher could ask the students to water the plants or flowers to enhance the learning on the use of water. Based on the example, it can be concluded that the true meaning of 'play activities' is depend on its functions and characteristics as one of the vehicles that can assist kindergarteners' learning.

Besides, there is a possibility that not all kindergarten teachers have used play-based activities in teaching kindergarteners as it depends on several factors such as, time allocation for the play activities, students' familiarity with the chosen play activities, appropriateness, and rules of the play activities. But one question to be pondered here is whether those teachers who used play-based activities really understand the purpose of using play-based activities? This is because some teachers might use play activities just for the sake of letting the children to have fun without having a clear purpose towards helping children to construct clear understanding on subject matter taught

Although some teachers knew about the importance of play-based activities towards children's cognitive development still, they are reluctant to apply the learning through play approach in kindergartens (Abu, 2008). This were due to several reasons, such as ambiguous about the clear purposes of using play-based activities and the learning through play approach and the demand of the parents which more preferred their children to read and write fast rather than looking at the processes involved in mastering the reading and writing skills. Apart from that, Hamid and Denim (n.d.) also found that preschool teachers more preferred to ask the kindergarteners to write and color pictures, as the preschool teachers were more concerned at the end product rather than the processes taken by the kindergarteners to achieve the end product. This finding by Hamid and Denim (n.d.) is based on three preschools in Besut, Terengganu that they had studied in their research, which is on the implementation of learning through play approach.

However, the above mentioned studies do not look at the preschool teachers' purposes on using play-based activities and the type of play-based activities used by the preschool teachers. This is because the above studies specifically focused on the

implementation of learning through play approach and not specifically look at the type of play-based activities used in preschool teachers' teaching. Therefore, this current study attempted to look at specifically on the use of play-based activities without giving any judgment whether the teachers have or have not a clear understanding about the learning through play approach.

1.4 Aim of the study and research objectives

The aim of this study is to look at on the use of play-based activities among preschool teachers in their teaching. Thus, the study focused specifically at three areas that are;

1. to find out the types of play-based activity used by the preschool teacher in assisting the kindergarteners with their learning
2. to find out the teachers' reasons for choosing and applying the play-based activities in teaching the kindergarteners
3. to find out the type of retention activities used by the preschool teachers to extend the kindergarteners' learning

1.5 Research Questions

These are the four research questions used to guide this study

1. What type of play-based activities used by the preschool teachers based on Smilansky (1968) four types of play-based activities in their teaching?
2. How the preschool teachers gathered the preschoolers' attention while engaged in the play-based activities?
3. Why using the selected play-based activities to teach the subject matter?
Why not using other activities?
4. What are the retention activities used by the preschool teachers to extend the students' understanding on the subject matter taught?

In short, this study is guided by Maria Montessori's philosophy on how children learn best. According to Maria Montessori (1906 cited in Rohrs, 1994), children prefer learning with play activities and a child learning is a preparation of life where the processes involved fun, promote freedom and enjoyment. She also developed several materials that can help children to strengthen their senses since she found that children liked to seep, color, discriminate sounds, care for the environment, jumping, washing and watering plants. Apart from that, she also pointed out twenty-five criteria which children could learn best for instance giving the children freedom, promote the children to love their learning, provide intrinsic motivation, well prepared environment, and respecting the children. Based on Maria Montessori's philosophy on how children learn best thus, some of the western preschool such as

the Mountain Pathways Kindergarten used Montessori's philosophy as their institution philosophy.

1.6 Significance of the study

Through the direct observational findings, the preschool teachers could determine or find out whether their previous approach or selected play-based activities were appropriate or not to their students' individual needs. Besides, other preschool teachers could also received information on how successful or not certain play-based activities have been.

For the teacher trainees who are enrolled in the teacher training program on becoming preschool teachers, the research finding can be used as their guides to deliberate and select which play-based activities are appropriate to be integrated in their daily teaching once they targeted to apply the "learning through play" approach. This finding could be considered useful for them especially when they were going out for their teaching practice in kindergartens. As part of the finding from the study is to find out the teachers' rationale in using certain play-based activities, thus, it provides information on why certain subject matter is taught using certain play-based activities.

Moreover, the findings from the study can help to provide guidelines and platform for both private and KEMAS kindergarten teachers who wanted to develop programs to address children' learning development or for people who are interested in early childhood or specifically in kindergarteners. For instance, if the target goal of the program is to select the best play-based activities that can be used to help children with their learning, thus, the program developer can use this study finding to select, which play-based activities should or should not be used. Moreover, this can helps the program developer to avoid choosing unsuitable play-based activities or to guide

them to invent some new play-based activities to be introduced to the kindergarten teachers.

1.7 Operational definition of the key terms

The following terms were used regularly in this study according to these definitions;

1.7.1 Children, kindergarteners or preschoolers

In this study the terms children, kindergarteners and preschoolers refer to those between the ages of 4 to 6 years old. The National Educational Act 1996 also emphasizes on the importance of providing children within ages 4 to 6 with preschool education (National Preschool Curriculum, 2001). This age group of children is different from the infants and toddlers who are aged between 1 to 2 years old and different from the preschoolers group study in the childcare center or known as 'Taska' in Malaysia who are 2 to 4 years old. Thus, the terms children, kindergarteners and kindergarten students were used synonymously for this study.

1.7.2 Preschool teachers

The term preschool teacher refers to the teacher who teaches in the national kindergartens, which is established by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Normally, in Malaysian kindergartens, the same teacher will teach all the six components; language and communication, physical education, cognitive sciences and mathematic, aesthetic creativity, moral study and socio emotional development while different teachers will teach the students on religious study (pendidikan agama). Preschool teachers play vital roles in addressing all aspects of children's development and introduce the children with basic skills such as singing, counting, writing, playing and reading (Essa, 1992). Through the definition, it can concluded that preschool teachers

are those who are given responsibility to assist children with their early learning. This is to prepare them before entering primary school setting (National Preschool Curriculum, 2001).

1.7.3 Ministry of Education (MoE) kindergarten

MoE kindergarten is the national kindergarten for students whose are aged between 4 to 6 years. MoE kindergarten is created by the Ministry of Education with the purpose to help kindergarteners develop social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development in a way to prepare the students for their formal primary education (National Preschool Curriculum, 2001). The main concept of this educational program is to follow the national preschool curriculum under the 1996 Education Act by giving a non-formal education to emphasize the children 3M knowledge which are, reading, writing and counting by learning them through play (National Preschool Curriculum, 2001). Apart from that, MoE kindergartens are dissimilar with PERPADUAN kindergartens, KEMAS kindergartens, Church-based kindergartens, and Childcare center or known as TASKA and other private kindergartens. Although all types of Malaysian kindergartens used the same curriculum specification however MoE kindergartens administration is control and monitor by the primary school administration since the preschool is located within the primary school compound.

1.7.4 Play-based activity

To define on what is play-based activity, it is crucial to define the term 'play' first. Play can be considered as an activity or tool whereby it involves a single or a group of children (Mayesky, 2002). Meanwhile according to Casey (2005), plays activities can lead the students towards creativity and imaginative as they are intrinsically motivated and free chosen activity especially for the children. Based on Shipley

(2002), play is defined as something that is meaningful and enjoyable for children whereby, it is a process oriented although the outcome is not necessarily has to be a product. In this study, play-based activity is define based on it characteristics and roles towards the children or kindergarteners' learning. Thus, it is define as one of the active tools that are used to assist kindergarteners to develop the main domains of children developments; emotional, social, cognitive, physical and intellect. Moreover, plays can be divided into indoor and outdoor plays. Both the indoor and outdoor plays activities have the same purposes, which is to help the kindergarteners with their learning.

1.7.5. Outdoor play activity

Outdoor activities are activities that are conducted outside the classroom setting such as physical education, field trips and outdoor painting. In this study, outdoor play activities are considered as the activities that conducted outside the classroom setting whereby, it carries the essential characteristic of play-based activities which are enjoyable and meaningful to address the children' learning. Similar with indoor play activities, the outdoor play activities is define based on its roles and characteristics in enriching and addressing the kindergarteners' learning aspects namely, emotional, social, intellectual, physical, cognitive and intellect aspects.

1.7.6 Retention activity

According to Brod (1995), based on Gagner-Briggs nine (9) events of instruction, retention activities are used to enhance the transfer of knowledge to make it more memorable. Basically, retention activities are the extra activities besides from the main activities used by the teachers to scaffold the kindergarteners' learning. The purpose of using retention activities is to provide adequate practice for the

kindergarteners, which enable them to have better understanding on the subject matter taught.

1.8 Scope of the study

This study is conducted in 12 selected MoE kindergartens in Kuching division and 20 preschool kindergarten teachers had been observed in using play-based activities in their teaching. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to other MoE kindergartens and other non MoE kindergartens, which are located within or outside Kuching division.

As this is a case study that only involved 12 selected MoE kindergarten schools, thus, the findings of this study are hardly used to represent all MoE kindergarten teachers who may have used play-based activities in their teaching. Moreover, this study only focuses on the MoE kindergarten teachers and do not include teachers who teach in other types of Malaysian kindergartens such as the private kindergartens, church-based kindergartens, and other types of kindergartens or for teacher who teach students with special needs kindergarten schools for instance, dyslexia center.

Finally, as the main purpose of this study is to gather information on the types and purposes of using particular play-based activities therefore, direct observation and semi-structured interview had been chosen as the main instruments to gather the required data. Other researchers who are interested in this particular field may employ other instruments such as analyzing documents such as the teachers' daily lesson plans and using questionnaire.

1.9 Chapter review

This chapter had briefly discussed the background of the use of play-based activities development and the two main domains of play-based activities, which are the indoor and outdoor activities. Moreover, this chapter had discussed the statement of problem of the study, the objectives of the study, the study significance, the operational definitions of terms and scope of study in completing this study. The following chapter reviewed related literatures that are related to the field of the use of play-based activities among preschool teachers. The next chapter also discussed the learning through play philosophy and relating it with Piaget's theory on children development as the framework of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter begins by focusing on the definition of plays or play-based activities. This is then followed by the purpose of using play-based activities in general, the importance of play-based activities to address kindergarteners' learning and give focus on learning through playing approach that is recommended by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the Malaysian preschool Education Curriculum Specification. In short, the following literature review attempts to support the research objectives with the support of Montessori's philosophy on the use of play activities in addressing children's learning and Piaget's theory on children's cognitive development.

2.1 Related studies

The study conducted by Abu (2008.) on 'The implementation of learning through play approach in central Malacca preschool' which involved 25 kindergartens teachers, had found that only 70% of the study participants understood on the learning through play approach while 30% of the participants showed less