



# LEARNING THROUGH PLAY IN VIETNAM

*A descriptive study of knowledge, attitudes, and practices among teachers, school leaders, education officials and caregivers in Hanoi, Thai Nguyen, Da Nang and Quang Tri provinces*



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## Acknowledgement

To reach their future potential, primary learners need a breadth of skills, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative skills. The school culture in present day Vietnam is highly academic results-oriented, however. To transform the knowledge-focused education system into an education system that equips learners with 21st century skills, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is rolling out a new, competency-based curriculum for the primary school level.

To support MOET in achieving the objectives of the new curriculum, VVOB – education for development (VVOB) is implementing “Integrating Play-based Learning Activities among Young Learners” (iPLAY) with the support of the LEGO Foundation (2019-2023). Through a combination of national in-service trainings and school-based Teacher Professional Development, VVOB will incorporate Learning through Play (LTP)-pedagogies in the classroom. To develop high-quality contextualized training materials for teachers and school leaders, VVOB conducted a baseline study covering the provinces of Hanoi, Thai Nguyen, Da Nang and Quang Tri. This report is the result of that study. It examines the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of key education actors in Vietnam.

The study was conducted by a dedicated team of VVOB staff members in June 2020. The team is grateful to the MoET, who supported this research, and to the staff of the various Departments of Education and Training at provincial and district levels of the four provinces, who shared their perspectives on learning through play with us. We also thank the National Women’s Union and its staff at provincial level, for giving us more insights into the perceptions of caregivers. In particular, we would like to thank all teachers, school leaders and caregivers who shared their personal opinions and their experiences, at school or at home, with us. Last, but not least, we are grateful for the logistical support of the administrative staff of all schools involved.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the results as much as we enjoyed collecting them. We look forward to your feedback!

**VVOB in Vietnam.**

## Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>BOET</b>	Bureau of Education and Training
<b>DoET</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>DS</b>	Descriptive study
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth interview
<b>iPLAY</b>	Integrating Play-based Learning Activities among Young Learners
<b>KAP</b>	Knowledge, Attitude and Practice
<b>LtP</b>	Learning through Play
<b>MoET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>MoLISA</b>	Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs
<b>NWU</b>	National Women’s Union
<b>TPD</b>	Teacher professional development

# Executive summary

## Background

The Descriptive Study (DS) on Learning through Play (LtP) in Vietnam is part of the “Integrating Play-based Learning Activities among Young Learners” (iPLAY) project (2019-2023) of VVOB - education for development (VVOB), which is funded by the LEGO Foundation. Within the framework of iPLAY, VVOB supports the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to achieve the objectives of the new 2018 curriculum<sup>1</sup> – to be implemented from September 2020 onwards – by developing primary school teachers’ attitudes, knowledge and competencies to implement Learning through Play (LtP)-pedagogies through a combination of national in-service trainings and school-based Teacher Professional Development (TPD).

Learning through Play (LtP) is a pedagogical approach that contributes to the holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical) of young children, laying the foundations for lifelong learning and equipping them with 21st century skills (e.g. problem solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, autonomy). Play is educational when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive (Zosh et al., 2017).

## Study objectives

The main objectives of the study are to assess primary school teachers’, school leaders’, caregivers’ and education officials’ understanding of LtP and their attitudes towards LtP- pedagogies; to examine to what extent current practices reflect the five characteristics of LtP (joyful, meaningful, socially interactive, actively engaging, and iterative) as identified by the LEGO Foundation (2017); and to identify what professional development needs need to be met to ensure the effective integration of LtP.

## Methodology

**Methodology** The DS was conducted by the iPLAY content staff in the provinces of Hanoi, Thai Nguyen, Da Nang and Quang Tri between May and July 2020 and involved 40 schools.

The DS made use of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The quantitative component consisted of a KAP survey among 320 teachers and 80 classroom observations in grades 1 and 3. As part of the qualitative component, the team conducted 96 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with grade 1-3 teachers, school leaders, education officials, as well as caregivers and representatives of the National Women’s Union (NWU) at district and provincial level. This report examines the primary data collected from the KAP survey, class observations and in-depth interviews (IDIs).

## Key findings

### Knowledge of LtP

Play is fundamental to how we learn. Through play, children are constantly learning about and connecting with their environments. Yet, too often, play is understood in contrast to learning. The study results show that this is partly the case in Vietnam. Caregivers, particularly, as well as a minority of teachers and school leaders think of learning and play as distinct activities. Still, most teachers (81.9%), as well as school leaders and officials think of play and learning as interconnected.

Play would foster cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical skills. Respondents showed strong agreement in this respect. Teachers and education officials noted that LtP contributes to the development of life skills, such as communication skills, and bolsters academic, knowledge. NWU representatives and caregivers emphasized how play helps children releasing energy and staying fit.

Play is educational when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive. The study also examined how teachers feel about these characteristics. We found that most teachers consider it important for learners to enjoy their lessons (93.5%), to collaborate during playful activities (98.2%), to choose what activities to do in the classroom (60%) and to learn by making mistakes (64.7%). They also agreed, however, that the “teacher should always be in control in the classroom” (91%); a view they shared with education officials and school leaders. Play nonetheless requires children to experience agency; that is to have control and take initiative and leadership over their actions. About 35 % of teachers, moreover, is of the opinion that children should not make mistakes in class, in spite

of the importance of trial and error when learning through play.

### Attitudes towards integrating LtP

Overall, respondents hold positive attitudes towards integrating LtP in primary schools and are willing to integrate it themselves. About 94 % of teachers expressed strong support for the integration of creative and playful ways of teaching. And, nearly all teachers (97.9%) confirmed that they would enjoy applying LtP in the classroom, at least after they have had training on LtP. School management and education officials express support too, stressing the relevance of the iPLAY project towards rolling out the new curriculum.

Contrary to what is often suggested in the literature on LtP, teachers did not fear parental resistance. Likewise, education officials and representatives of the NWU strongly believed that caregivers will support LtP, as they expect their children to enjoy attending school – these views were confirmed by caregivers we interviewed.

### Current classroom practices

During the classroom observations, observers indicated to what extent the characteristics of play (joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging, iterative and meaningful) were present in the classroom environment.

Classroom observations showed that current teaching practices are somewhat playful. While they observed at least some level of joy, social interaction and active engagement, there were very few opportunities for learners to experiment with new content (iteration); nor did teachers build on the interests of children to enrich the lesson and make it more tangible (meaningful). Teachers’ lack of understanding the

<sup>(1)</sup> In 2018, MOET is officially announcing the General Education Program and 27 subject programs and education activities in the New Curriculum. Source : <https://moet.gov.vn/tintuc/Pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-bo.aspx?ItemID=5755>

## Executive summary

need for iteration is also illustrated by the failure to assist learning. Less than half of all teachers observed used scaffolding. Hence, the majority did not correct students' mistakes by explaining why the answer is wrong or helping them to find the correct answer.

Group work is the most popular playful learning activity teachers currently use. 72.5% of surveyed teachers applies group work on a daily basis in the KAP survey. Other often-used playful learning activities include free reading, role play, quizzes, math games, free art and free play – over 50% of teachers use these activities at least a few times a week. Story writing, computer games and corner work are rare; respectively 58.1%, 40.3% and 34.7% of teachers has never implemented these activities.

While 90% of teachers reported that their students pay attention and regularly raise their hand to respond to questions, class observations showed that students' participation, and its quality, is poor and students have little autonomy. In most classes observed, students did not have the chance to select content, topics or make rules for play activities. More generally, the classroom observations showed that the general teaching style is one that is focused on traditional teacher-centered lecturing.

### Classroom infrastructure and resources.

Most classrooms that were visited as part of this study were deemed inadequate for organizing group work because of the sheer number of students and limited space. The observers also noted that more than half of all classrooms lacked playful teaching materials, such as story books, posters, and games. Many teachers did display students' artwork and

other learning products.

With respect to teaching and learning materials, teachers are in favor of using books (92.5%), worksheets (91.6%), flashcards (91.3%), and to a lesser extent housekeeping items (78.4%) and toys (66.3%).

### Professional Development Needs

Currently, there is no teacher professional development offered on the topic of LtP. LtP is nonetheless a recommended practice. What is more, teachers who apply LtP during demonstrations lessons usually receive better evaluations – demonstrations lessons are part of the bi-annual outstanding teacher competitions that are organized by MOET at various levels are common. The impact of teacher competitions on daily practice is however extremely limited.

According to the survey, more than 80 % of teachers wants to take part in trainings on integrating LtP in the classroom. Primary teachers would also welcome scripted lessons plans on how to apply LtP (85.9%) and clear guidance and direction from their school leadership (72.2%). Whereas about two thirds of teachers also indicated to be eager to receive coaching from their head of department or other colleagues, a little more than 50% of teachers would appreciate similar support from their school leader or an education official. About half of teachers supports the idea of organizing parent-teacher meetings to raise awareness on the benefits of LtP among caregivers.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**Holistic understanding of LtP:** Teachers, school leaders, education officials and caregivers support the implementation of LtP in the classroom, primarily because they want children to enjoy attending school. Yet, their understanding of LtP is fragmented. Most caregivers, first, think of play in contrast to learning – a view a minority of teachers, school leaders and education officials shared. And nearly all respondents believed that LtP should be teacher-led, hence disregarding the importance of learners' agency and autonomy. The study also shows that the characteristics of 'iteration' and 'meaningfulness' are poorly understood. Hence, there is a need to deepen and widen teachers', school leaders', officials' and caregivers' understanding of LtP.

**Strengthen support system:** Currently there are no opportunities for teacher professional development on LtP; None are there any guidelines or directions available. Teachers did nonetheless indicate a great willingness to take part in professional development activities. Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Provide teacher training on LtP;
- Integrate LtP into school-based TPD activities, such as peer-to-peer coaching and joint lesson planning (school level) and verify their effectiveness in the daily teaching practice.
- Integrate LtP activities into the school year implementation plan, including parent-teacher meetings (school level);
- Set up a sustainable system of support across levels (class-school-district-province-national ministry), whereby officials provide coaching and mentoring.

**Apply an inclusive lens:** Play does not discriminate. It is important to encourage learners to engage in all kinds of play, without being hindered by gender stereotypes, disabilities, or language. To this end, it is recommended to develop an accessibility and participation checklist for LtP activities. It is equally important to encourage all adults, men, and women, to engage in play with their children – currently, mainly mothers engage in play.



# I. PART 1. INTRODUCTION

## I.1. Context

National and international assessments, such as PISA and Oxford University’s Young Lives’ study, show that the majority of Vietnamese learners perform well in reading, mathematics and science (Education Development Trust, 2018; Iyer & Moore, 2017). Strong learning achievements are to a large extent the result of the highly results-oriented school culture in Vietnam. Classroom practice is traditionally highly teacher-centered and knowledge-focused. While the country experienced rapid economic growth in the past decade thanks to its young, well-educated workforce, the nature of work is changing, exposing a dire need for more advanced skills, such as problem-solving and social skills (World Bank, 2014).

To this end, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) experimented with the Vietnam Escuela Nueva (VNEN) approach (Parandekar et al., 2017). Yet, fundamental shifts in teaching practices did not materialize, to large extent because of gaps in the in-service teacher professional development system – particularly a disconnect between national and district level education officers. Currently, MoET is cooperating with the World Bank to strengthen the in-service teacher professional development system as part of the Enhancing Teaching Education Program (ETEP, 2016-2021).

From September 2020 onwards, MOET will introduce a new competence-based curriculum. The new curriculum aims at “transforming the knowledge-focused education system into an education system that is able to comprehensively develop each student’s qualities and capacity, ethics, intelligence, physical health as well as their potential” (Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT, MOET, 2018). This requires a fundamental shift away from the teacher-centered reality to embrace integrated pedagogies that focus on “practice, application of learned knowledge and

skills to solve problems” (Ibid.)

Learning through Play (LtP) is a pedagogy that combines playful, child-directed activity with intentional facilitation on the part of the educator to foster a broad range of learning outcomes (Parker & Thomsen, 2019, p. 66). Play is educational when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive (Zosh et al., 2017). This pedagogical approach contributes to the holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical) of children, laying the foundations for lifelong learning and equipping them with 21st century skills (e.g. problem solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, autonomy). LtP-pedagogies have great potential to contribute to achieving the objectives of the new curriculum: LtP stimulates hands-on practice and discovery, deepens learning and contributes to the development of a breadth of skills learners need in the rapidly changing Vietnamese context.

The “Integrating Play-based Learning Activities among Young Learners” (iPLAY) project aims to support MOET to achieve the objectives of the new curriculum by developing primary school teachers’ attitudes, knowledge and competencies to incorporate LtP-pedagogies in the classroom through a combination of national in-service trainings and school-based Teacher Professional Development (TPD).

Without an enabling school environment, teachers are, however, unlikely to experiment with LtP, particularly given the culture of academic achievement in Vietnam. Therefore, iPLAY concomitantly strives to create a learner-friendly school environment that is conducive to play. To this end, we will work with school leaders, district education officers and parents/caregivers. To reach out to the latter

## I.1. Context

group, iPLAY cooperates with the National Women's Union (NWU), building upon their network of 80,000 parents' clubs to host information and awareness raising activities in addition to outreach via school (via parent-teacher meetings).

By concerting efforts at all levels of the education system through involvement of key actors (government staff, school leaders, teachers and caregivers), iPLAY aims to create an enabling environment that recognizes the contributions of LtP to children's holistic development, and will equip teachers with the necessary skills and competences to integrate LtP in the primary school classroom. Figure 2 visualizes iPLAY's Theory of Change (ToC). The project is deemed successful when primary

school teachers in Vietnam have the confidence, knowledge, attitudes, and skills to implement LtP-pedagogies in the classroom.

Ultimately aiming for nationwide coverage, iPLAY adopts a replication scaling strategy. In the first stage (2020-2021), we will train district education officers, school leaders and teachers in 2 rural (Quang Tri and Thai Nguyen) and 2 urbans (Ha Noi and Da Nang) provinces. Next (2021-2022) iPLAY is expanded to an additional 4 provinces (Ha Giang, Lai Chau, Quang Ngai, and Ho Chi Minh City). In the last phase (2022-2023) the project will reach national scale by adapting the teacher training package to the online environment.

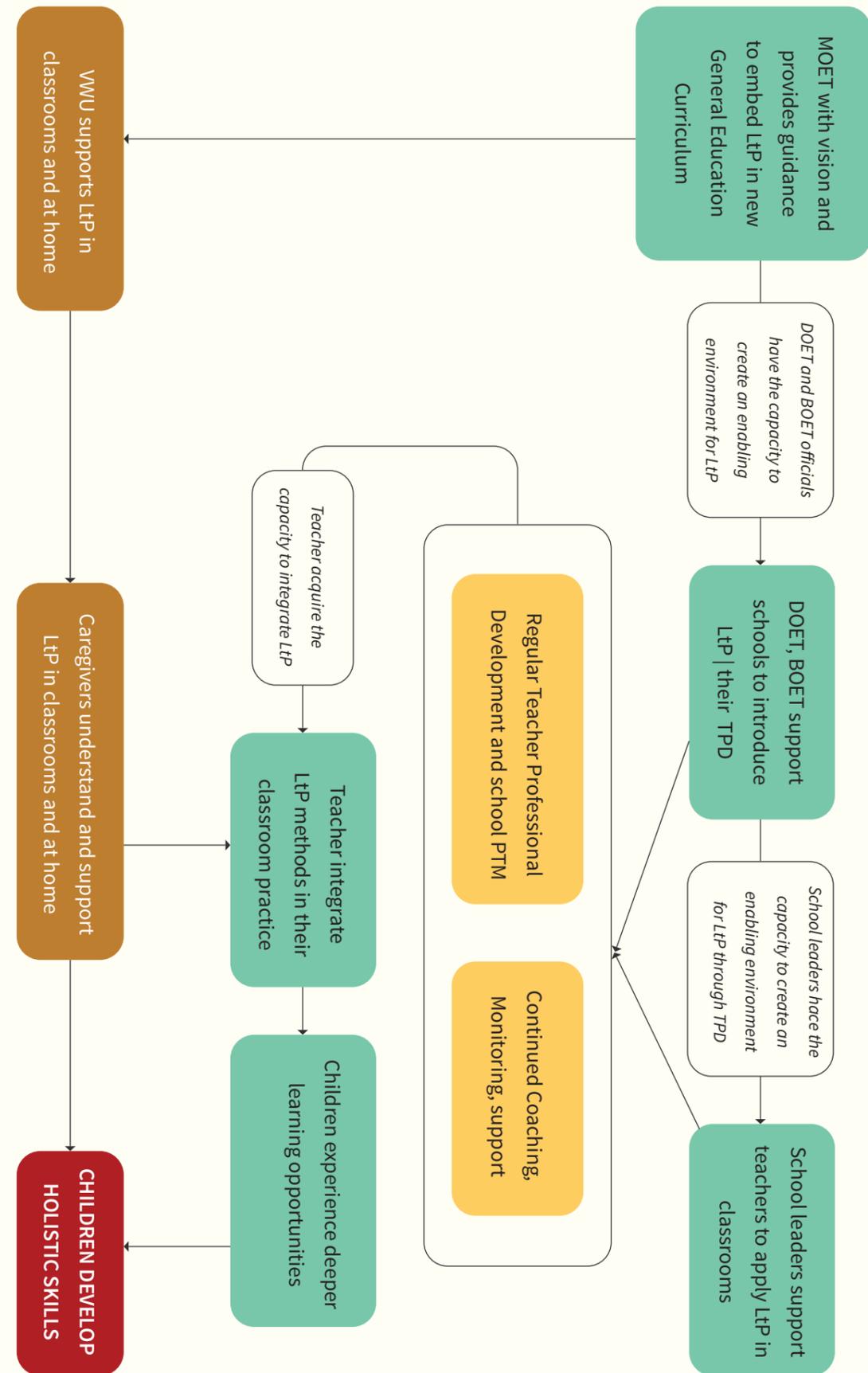


Figure 2: iPLAY's Theory of change

## I.2. Objectives of this study

To inform our teacher training materials and approach, the iPLAY team aims to gain a deep understanding of teachers, school leaders, education officials and caregivers' attitudes towards and knowledge of Learning through Play (LtP) and to generate information on the current practices in primary schools in Vietnam. The study also examines what support system is required for teachers to successfully integrate LtP in the classrooms. Lastly, results of the study will provide an information base for the monitoring and evaluation of the iPLAY project's progress and effectiveness.

The descriptive study is intended to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- **Knowledge:** To understand what G1-3 teachers, primary school leaders, primary education officials, and caregivers understand by 'Learning through Play' (LtP); and to assess how their understanding differs from what the project understands by LtP<sup>1</sup>;
- **Attitudes:** To gauge the attitudes of G1-3 teachers, primary school leaders, primary education officials at provincial and district levels towards the integration of LtP – as understood by the project – in classrooms concomitant with the new curriculum;
- **Practices:** To observe to what extent current classroom practices reflect the characteristics of LtP, as understood by the project.

In addition, we aim to:

- Identify the professional development needs of teachers and school leaders to apply quality LtP.

(1) We define Learning-through-Play as a pedagogical approach that uses playful activities for learning purposes. LtP contributes to the holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical) of young children, equipping them with 21st century skills (e.g. problem solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, autonomy) and laying the foundations for lifelong learning. Play is educational when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive. Play and learning cannot be separated.

## I.3. Methodology

The Descriptive study (DS) made use of a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Because of the available resources and time, the descriptive study focuses on the first phase provinces, i.e. Ha Noi, Thai Nguyen, Da Nang, and Quang Tri. The selected provinces are representative because of the urban-rural and geographical mix: Hanoi and Thai Nguyen are respectively an urban and rural province in the north of Vietnam, whereas Da Nang and Quang Tri represent an urban and rural province in the center of the country.

**Qualitative Research Methods:** the study team conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with a selection of grade 1-3 teachers (1/school surveyed), school leaders (5 school leaders/province), DOET and BOET officials (1 per province and district respectively), staff of the WU (1 per province), and caregivers (5 per province). In total, 96 IDIs took place. In addition, case studies document insights from the in-depth interviews and class observations.

**Quantitative component:** the team designed a brief self-administrative questionnaire for teachers from grade 1 to grade 3 to assess their knowledge, attitudes,

and practices (KAP) using the Kobo Toolbox software. In total, we administered 320 KAP questionnaires in 40 primary schools. Per grade (1-3), we selected 2 primary teachers, as well as 2 subject teachers after a combination of purposeful and random stratified sampling: within each province, we purposefully selected two districts representative of the character of the province (urban/rural). Per district, 5 primary schools were randomly selected after stratification by distance from district capital ('Within 5 km from district capital' vs 'Beyond 5 km from district capital'). Questions in the questionnaires were developed based on a desk study, as well as on the project indicators of the logical framework. Central to the questionnaire are 24 statements, measuring teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards LtP; 13 positively framed statements and 11 negative statements. To respond, teachers indicated their level of (dis)agreement on a 5-point Likert scale .

**Classroom Observations:** The DS observed 80 lessons (2 observations per school, i.e. observation of home teacher of grade 1 and grade 3).

Table 1. Sample size

Data collection tool	Hanoi	Thai Nguyen	Da Nang	Quang Tri	Total
<b>KAP survey (teachers)</b>	80	80	80	80	320
<b>Classroom Observations</b>	20	20	20	20	80
<b>In-depth interviews</b>					
Teachers	10	10	10	10	40
Caregivers	5	5	5	5	20
School leaders	5	5	5	5	20
Education officials (BOET, DOET)	3	3	3	3	12
WU staff	1	1	1	1	4
<b>Case study/short story</b>	2	1	1	1	5

The study team followed regulations or guidelines governing research ethics. A clear statement on the purpose of the research, the information requested, and the anticipated duration preceded the interaction with the respondent. The brief emphasized the voluntary nature of participation in the process and ensured confidentiality – note that all interviewees quoted in this report have a code name.

## 1.4. Limitations

**Generalizability:** The current study was conducted in the four phase-1 provinces of the iPLAY project. Whereas the provinces have been selected to represent urban as well as rural contexts, the provinces are primarily representative of the Northern and Central regions of Vietnam. None of the selected provinces is located in the South of the country. Furthermore, the study is largely qualitative in nature, except for the teacher KAP survey, and therefore limited in reach, meaning that insights and conclusions cannot be generalized to the entire population. This is particularly true for the views and practices of caregivers.

**Interviewer bias:** The study was conducted by iPLAY staff members with the aim of gaining a deep understanding of the needs of beneficiaries. As a downside, it is likely that there is some degree of interviewer/observer bias. Despite prior training,

The in-depth interviews with teachers were conducted at a place where the researchers and respondents were visible to but not within the hearing range of their peers and school leaders to reduce disturbance and a comfortable setting to discuss potentially sensitive matters.

iPLAY staff members might, for instance, have differed in their rating of classroom observations. To minimize such bias, enumerators were asked to add comments or further explain their ratings.

**Social desirability and respondent error:** Even though the team has attempted to reduce social desirability to a minimum (e.g. use of confidentiality, emphasizing openness, ...), it is likely that some respondents have provided socially desirable answers, particularly education officials in order to reflect national policy. With respect to random error, some teachers indicated that they did not have enough time to read all questions carefully and thoughtfully because they participated during break-time.



# PART 2. LEARNING THROUGH PLAY IN VIETNAM: KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, SCHOOL LEADERS, EDUCATION OFFICIALS AND CAREGIVERS

## II.1. Background Characteristics of Respondents

In total, we interviewed 40 teachers, 20 school leaders, 20 caregivers, 12 education officials and 4 WU staff. In addition, we surveyed 320 grade 1 to 3 primary school teachers (see Table 2). Note that over 90 % of all surveyed teachers are women. Indeed, women are considerably over-represented in the teaching profession in Vietnam, particularly at primary school level: female teachers make up 78,7% of all teachers (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2018-2019)<sup>1</sup>. . On average, teachers are 38 years old and have been teaching for an average of 15 years. The large majority of teachers are homeroom teachers<sup>2</sup>. Among those 320 teachers, we selected 80 teachers of grade 1 or 3 in order to observe a class in literacy (Vietnamese; 51% of classes observed) or math (49% of all classes observed).

In this section we consecutively examine to what extent key education actors think of play in relation to learning, what benefits they discern, and what they perceive to be the characteristics of Learning through Play.

Table 2. Teacher characteristics (N=320)

Variable	%	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.
<b>Age</b>		38.1 (8.7)	22	64
<b>Teaching Experience</b>		15 (9.2)	1	36
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	8.1%			
Female	91.9%			
<b>Province</b>				
Ha Noi	25%			
Da Nang	25%			
Quang Tri	25%			
Thai Nguyen	25%			
<b>Level of education</b>				
Intermediate (2 years)	2.5 %			
College degree (3 years)	21.6%			
Bachelor University degree (4 years)	75%			
Master / PhD	0.9%			
<b>Teaching in gradea</b>				
1	40.9%			

(1) Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) [https://www.gso.gov.vn/SLTK/Selection.aspx?rxid=1fcd9551-176f-46c5-b0fb-9dcc8466777&px\\_db=10.+Gi%3%a1o+d%e1%bb%a5c&px\\_type=PX&px\\_language=vi&px\\_tableid=10.+Gi%3%a1o+d%e1%bb%a5c%5cV10.06.px](https://www.gso.gov.vn/SLTK/Selection.aspx?rxid=1fcd9551-176f-46c5-b0fb-9dcc8466777&px_db=10.+Gi%3%a1o+d%e1%bb%a5c&px_type=PX&px_language=vi&px_tableid=10.+Gi%3%a1o+d%e1%bb%a5c%5cV10.06.px)

(2) A homeroom teacher teaches main subjects, such as Mathemetic and Vietnamese, in a specific class and grade, while subject teachers teach specific subjects, such as music, gymnastics or arts, covering multiple classes and grades (Article 17 of Circular 41/2010/TT-BGDĐT, 2014).

Variable	%	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.
2	39.7%			
3	45.9%			
<b>Type of teacher</b>				
Homeroom	75.9 %			
Subject teacher	24,1 %			

*\*Note that some teachers teach in several grades. For instance, 34 teachers are active in all three grades.*

## II.2. Knowledge of Learning through Play

In this section we consecutively examine to what extent key education actors think of play in relation to learning, what benefits they discern, and what they perceive to be the characteristics of Learning through Play.

### 2.2.1. Measuring opposition to play

**‘Play’ is often understood in contrast to ‘learning’.** The stigma which often surrounds play, as a ‘fun’ activity, could represent one of the main challenges to introducing play-based learning in Vietnam. Yet, the KAP results are positive. The survey contained 4 statements assessing teachers’ understanding of play in relation to learning. According to the majority of the surveyed teachers, play does have its space in the primary school classroom. For instance, 95.7% of teachers agrees (strongly) that play-based activities reinforce learning. One teacher explained: “Learning through play means playing for a learning purpose. Play can occur inside or outside of lessons” (Source: Teacher, Code J22, Hanoi city).

Table 3: Percentage of primary school teachers (N=320) in agreement with:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Play is the opposite of learning.	2.5	7.8	7.8	60.6	21.3
2. The only time students should play at school is during break times (recreation).	4.1	15.9	6.3	52.8	20.9
3. Play-based activities in the classroom reinforce learning.	36.3	59.4	0.3	1.6	2.5
4. In the classroom, learners are not supposed to play.	2.8	7.8	8.4	60.3	20.6

## II.2. Knowledge of Learning through Play

**Other teachers support play-based activities in the classroom but limit it to certain subjects:** “I know learning through play is a positive method. But to apply it, I think it should be used in some lessons, in all lessons it would be impossible” (Source: Teacher, Code L21, Quang Tri province).

**Another common finding was that education actors interpret LtP as ‘games’.** When talking about LtP, one school leader merely referred to games: “Games play an important role.” (Source: School leader, Code F26, Da Nang).

**Still, a minority of teachers thinks that play-based activities do not belong in the classroom.** These teachers perceive play in opposition to learning, although play could help – according to them – to relax students: “For me, learning is learning. Playing is playing. If we mainstream play in study activities, I am not sure that students can achieve the study objectives, particularly in the subject of mathematics.” (Source: Teacher, code F22, Thai Nguyen province). Likewise, a majority of education officials support play in the classroom. Only a minority thinks that playing and learning are two separately activities: “Play activities are part of extracurricular times. Moreover, parents will resist teachers who organize more games and extracurricular activities. Also, where is money for organizing games? So just private schools where they have enough conditions can apply play activities, but for public schools, I think this is big problem” (Source: Education official, Code D23, Hanoi).

**In contrast to teachers and education officials, the majority of parents believe that play-based activities are separate from learning activities.** Many parents think of play as a reward for learners. According to the interviewees, students can play when they finish lessons or homework. One parent shared: “Playing after studying, it will be more receptive.” (Source: Male 42 ages, Parent, Code H24 Da Nang city). Play in the classroom is dismissed, as: “Too much play leads children to become playful and the ability to focus on knowledge will decrease” (Source: Parent, Code H18, Quang Tri province).

**NWU staff to understand play-based activities and learning as two separate elements.** NWU representatives did nonetheless agree that schools should increase the play activities by adding extracurricular activities.

### 2.2.2. Benefits of Learning through Play

**Play would foster cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical skills.** In a second set of statements in the KAP survey, the iPLAY team aimed to measure to what extent teachers discern similar benefits to play-based learning. For each skill, we included one statement (see table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of primary school teachers (N=320) in agreement with:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The sole purpose of schooling is to learn how to read, write and calculate.	5.6	16.9	1.9	60.9	14.7
2. At school, children should not only learn how to read, write, and calculate, but also develop social, emotional, physical, and creative skills.	65.3	29.4	0	0.6	4.7
3. Through play children release energy and stay fit.	34.1	61.9	0.9	1.9	1.3
4. Through play children interact and make friends.	46.6	51.2	0.6	0.6	1.3
5. Play sparks children’s creativity.	52.5	45.6	0	0.3	1.6
6. Play helps children to make sense of the world around them	49.1	48.4	0.6	0.3	1.6
7. Play, such as role play, helps children to develop their emotional skills (for instance, control anger, become more self-confident, express emotions)	40	55.6	3.1	0.6	0.6

**Nearly all teachers (94.7%) agree that, at school, learners should not only learn how to read, write and calculate, but also develop social, emotional, physical and creative skills.** This finding is supported by teachers’ disagreement to the statement “The sole purpose of schooling is to read, write and calculate” (statement in the KAP questionnaire).

**For each of the five skills that LtP would foster, teachers showed strong agreement.** Hence, according to the teachers, play helps children to release energy and stay fit (physical skills); to interact and make friends (social skills); to become more creative (creative skills); to make sense of the world

around them (cognitive skills); and to develop their emotional skills.

**These views are also confirmed by the qualitative interviews.** Homeroom teachers explained how LtP contributes to children’s development, particularly emphasizing the development of socio-emotional skills such as communication skills, increased confidence, and improved public speaking: “Students will become more confident and develop their personality” (Source: Teachers, Code F23, Hanoi city). Learning through play would also support the development other skills, such as “calculation skills, words findings and make sentences and reading

## II.2. Knowledge of Learning through Play

skills” (Source: Teacher, Code E27, Dang city).

**Likewise, education officials recognize the benefits of play-based activities.** Education officials particularly referred to the positive impact on the development of communication skills, presentation skills, and public speaking: Learning through play will foster competencies of each learner. Learners have the chance to show their presentation skills, planning skills and leading skills. Presentation skills are very important for primary students because when presenting children must speak in full sentences. Second, playing and learning is a method that let children learn effectively, this is my opinion” (Source: Education official, Code C30, Đà Nẵng). Another official confirmed: “Learning through play will help children access more knowledge” (Source: Education official, Code D18, Quang Tri province).

**Although parents thought of learning and playing as two separate things, they did believe that play contributes to the holistic development of young children.** Most parents that were interviewed were aware that children should not only learn academic knowledge nowadays but that they also need other skills. Some caregivers in Da Nang and Hanoi cities even complained that public schools are overemphasizing academic learning to the detriment of developing learners’ life skills. This is quite a paradigm shift. Whether parents live in rural or urban areas, the study found that parents believe that playing will help children develop physical skills and become more confident. WU staff also believe that play-based activities will benefit students.

### 2.2.3. Characteristics of LtP

**The KAP survey also examined to what extent teachers think learning should reflect the five characteristics of LtP** (joyful, meaningful, iterative, actively engaging, socially interactive). It appears that teachers consider it important for learners to enjoy their lessons (93.5%). Not surprisingly then, many teachers shared that they like to be creative and invent playful ways to teach (94.4%). Nearly all teachers also agreed that playing is about collaborating (98.2%).

**A majority of teachers agrees that it is important to let children choose what activities to do in the classroom (60%) and to learn by making mistakes (64.7%).** Still, a significant minority disagrees. And less than half of all teachers believes there is enough time to let learners experiment on their own to explore new content – this does not mean that they would support experimentation in the classroom however.

**For children to be able to learn though play, they need autonomy and agency; that is the opportunity to choose and take initiative, and leadership over their actions.** This does not mean that adults can or should not have a role in children’s play, but that adults see the child as capable to (jointly) plan and control the flow of activities during play (VOB, 2018). This view is, however, not shared by teachers: the majority of survey respondents (91%) believes play-based activities should be led by the teacher to be educational. More generally, 91.5% believes the teacher should be in control in the classroom. Common comments included “Pupils need to always follow the teacher’s instruction” or “Teacher in control at all times”.

Table 5: Percentage of primary school teachers (N=320) in agreement with:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I think it is important that learners enjoy my lessons.	36.3	57.2	2.8	3.1	0.6
2. I like to be creative and invent playful ways to teach literacy and numeracy.	31.3	63.1	4.7	0.6	0.3
3. Children should regularly be able to choose what activities to do in the classroom.	9.1	50.9	22.5	16.6	0.9
4. I strongly believe in learning by allowing learners to make mistakes.	6.3	58.4	19.7	12.8	2.8
5. It takes too much time to let my learners’ experiment to explore new content on their own.	3.8	35.9	15.6	39.4	5.3
6. Playing a game is about having fun together and collaborating.	43.8	54.4	0.9	0.3	0.6
7. Playing a game is about winning.	12.2	44.4	7.2	33.1	3.1
8. If play-based activities are to contribute to learning, they should be led by the teacher.	24.7	66.3	4.1	4.4	0.6
9. In the classroom, the teacher should always be in control.	25.6	65.9	3.4	4.7	0.3

### Box 1: Five characteristics of Learning through play

**Joyful:** Joy is at the heart of play - both enjoying a task for its own sake and the momentary thrill of surprise, insight, or success after overcoming challenges.

**Actively Engaging:** Learning through play also involves being actively engaged. Mental immersion and ability to stay focused are especially powerful in the context of learning through play.

**Meaningful:** Meaningful is when the child can relate new experiences to something already known. By doing so, they can express and expand their understanding through a variety of media, symbols, and tools.

**Iterative:** Iterative is when children try out possibilities, revise hypotheses and discover the next question. Iteration leads to increased learning.

**Social interaction:** Social interaction is a powerful tool for both learning and play. By communicating their thoughts, understanding others through direct interaction, and sharing ideas, children are not only able to enjoy being with others, but also to build deeper understanding and more powerful relationships.

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When discussing the characteristics of LtP with **education officials**, they mainly emphasized the importance of linking play to educational content: “I understand that learning through play is playing with a specific purpose. Play activities must be relevant to a study subject, it not just play, it should be play to learn” (Source: School leader, Code D18, Thai Nguyen province). Another official confirmed: “Learning through play means playing purposefully, playing with the orientation of teachers, not playing normally. Learning through play is a school-oriented play aimed at achieving certain educational goals” (Source: Education officials, Code D14, Quang Tri province). Hence, like teachers, education officials favor teachers to be in control of and leading the activities.

Whereas few references were made to equity concerns, one education official shared that it might be more challenging for teachers of learners from ethnic minority groups to use play-based activities because they are generally less proficient in Vietnamese: “Ethnic minority students are usually shy It is unlikely that they will participate” (Source, School leader, Code E5, Quang Tri province).

**Parents**, regardless of their background, mainly stressed the importance of joy. They expected their children to enjoy attending school: “I work as a motorbike repairer. I do not know about parenting. But I always ask my son how you are today when he comes back home. If my son says, ‘today I am so happy, mom’, then I am happy too. To be honest, I do not like children to study too much” (Source: Woman, 30 years old, Parent, Code H18, Thai Nguyen province). Another parent shared: “An outstanding teacher has three things. First, a teacher should help students understand the lesson. Second, make students have fun in the safest and most exciting way. Third, a teacher must make children passionate about themselves”

(Source: Male 42 ages, Code parent E2 Da Nang city).

### 2.2.4. Willingness to integrate LtP in the primary school classroom

From September 2020 onwards, the MOET will roll out the new curriculum starting with grade 1. In subsequent years, other grades will follow. School leaders and teachers have been well prepared, they shared, to implement this new curriculum. They are nonetheless still wondering about the selection of textbooks.

**Promisingly, nearly all teachers (97.9%) participating in the survey confirmed that they would enjoy applying LtP in the classroom.** While they also believe to have the required skills, about one third of teachers anticipates facing challenges in terms of classroom management. One fifth of teachers fears not to have enough time to meet the curriculum’s academic standards when integrating LtP. During the in-depth interviews, teachers also shared some concerns in terms of time investment, recognition, and class infrastructure (see case study below). School leaders noted similar limitations, especially with respect to class size: “Games play an important role, but they also have some limitations. Specifically, if the number of students in the class is too large, it would be difficult to apply games. In my opinion, a class should only have 20 children so it will be better and more effective to organize games. When there are too many students, they do not have the chance to participate in games. Secondly, facilities such as rooms are small and the number of students is large, making it difficult for students to move” (Source: School leader, Code F26, Da Nang).

**Also promising is that most surveyed teachers feel that they would have school leaders’ support for the integration of LtP.** While the latter indeed

expressed support, it was striking that some school leaders do not believe their teachers are actually willing to change their practices: “There are still old teachers, young teachers and lazy teachers who just want to follow old teaching methods, just want to follow teacher’s books. They just do what the teacher’s

book requires without anything more. Their capacity is very limited. Changing to new things, they need time” (Source: Education officials, Code D20 Quang Tri province).

Table 6: Percentage of primary school teachers (N=320) in agreement with:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I would enjoy applying Learning through Play in the classroom.	31.6	66.3	2.2	0	0
2. I think I have the skills required to apply Learning through Play in the classroom.	11.9	71.9	12.5	3.4	0.3
3. If I introduce play-based activities, it will be very difficult to manage the classroom.	3.1	29.4	20	45.3	2.2
4. If I introduce play-based activities, I will not have the time to meet the curriculum's academic standards.	2.8	19.7	21.9	54.1	1.6
5. I think the school management would support the integration of Learning through Play.	21.3	72.2	5.9	0.6	0
6. If I introduce play-based activities, the parents of my pupils will start complaining to the school management.	0.9	9.4	22.5	63.1	4.1

**Only one out of ten teachers think that parents will complain to the school management if they integrate LtP.** Likewise, education officials and NWU staff believe that caregivers support the integration of LtP, especially in the early years of primary education as the transition from kindergarten to elementary is

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difficult for many young children: “I think parents will definitely support schools applying LtP. I think it is time to change because children are in preschool, they play more than learning. When they move to the primary school level, the environment changes suddenly, which may students to experiment a shock. Thus, learning through play method will bring harmony” (Source: WU, Code E27, Đà Nẵng).

**It is interesting to note that most caregivers were not aware of the roll out of a new curriculum.** Only two out of 20 respondents reported to have ever heard about the New curriculum, even though they did not know exactly what changed.

**Education officials support the integration of LtP as they consider it to be aligned with the new curriculum.** The DOET representatives believe that it will contribute to achieving the objectives of the new curriculum since both programs focus on practice, application of learned knowledge and problem-solving skills: “Play based activities surely contribute to the new curriculum. Play with a specific purpose, or deliberate playing, is consistent with the new curriculum of MOET” (Source: Education official, Code E 18, Quang Tri province). Furthermore, they shared that in the current system too, teachers are encouraged to use engaging and innovative practices, such as group work, and that teachers are rewarded for applying such methods in outstanding teacher competitions or in teacher evaluations.

However, the impact of the positive teaching methods applied in special events (such as outstanding teacher competition) on daily classroom practice seems to be limited. The case study below shows hindrance reasons for restricting teachers applying play-based activities in daily classroom practice.

### Box 2: Why teachers are reluctant to apply play-based activities in the classroom

Ms. An\* is a primary teacher in Danang city. She has been teaching for 3 years. As a young teacher, Ms. An described herself as an active person who is willing to learn and apply new concepts.

Like other teachers, An explains, she only applies play-based learning activities on special occasions, for example when they come to observe her class. Under normal circumstances, she is reluctant to integrate play-based activities because of the following three reasons:

**First**, preparing play-based activities is very time-consuming. You need to develop a lesson plan and allocate time, but also prepare materials. At the same time, teachers are expected to deliver the set curriculum.

**Second**, An would invest more time if there was clear guidance and support coming from school leader and education officials (BOET/DOET). Currently, teachers are expected to develop play-based activities based on self-study and through learning by doing. An would feel more confident if there were materials to support her. In addition, she would like to receive some recognition for integrating LtP.

**Third**, the classroom environment is not adequate. Teachers lack space and resources.

Source: Descriptive study, Danang city.

Note: An is a nick name. The real name and address of interviewee were changed ensure confidential and personal respect.

## II.4. Current Practices

In the current study, we combined two approaches to examine classroom practices. On the one hand, teachers reported their behavior using interviews and surveys. On the other hand, we observed a set of classrooms directly.

### 2.4.1. Examining the five characteristics of play

Using a classroom observation form, the observers rated the extent to which they observed the five characteristics of LtP (see Table 7). Overall, only one quarter of schools exposed at least some of the characteristics of play a lot. In most classes, nonetheless, the observers at least observed some level of joy, social interaction, and active engagement. The characteristics that were least present are

‘iterative’ and ‘meaningful’. In the majority of classes observed, children could not experiment with new content (iterative), while their teachers did not use the interests of the child to enrich the lesson and make it more tangible for the learners. In line with these results, the observers indicated that less than half of all observed teachers (34) use scaffolding<sup>1</sup>, a technique that is deemed important to the successful application of LtP. Indeed, teachers did not stop to show students where they went wrong and help them on the right track. In many classes, teachers just tried to go through all parts of the lesson focusing on how to complete the lesson within the provided 35 - 40 minutes.

(1) Scaffolding was described as the teacher circulating the classroom, leaning in to suggest next steps, or gives hints while learners explore content or exercise on their own.

Table 7. N° of classrooms as rated by observers (N=80 Class observation)

Description (Five characteristics)	Not observed	A little	A lot
<b>Active engagement</b>			
The children are involved with and absorbed by what they are doing, and they can persist despite distractions. Children are thinking along, they are focused on the activity (not staring out of the window).	7	51	21
The teacher uses activities with different levels of challenge for children.	45	22	13
The teacher motivates children to engage at the beginning and during tasks and activities.	21	19.7	21.9
<b>Iterative</b>			
The children repeatedly try out new possibilities, revise hypotheses and explore other ways to do things.	52	22	5
The teacher motivates children to experiment and try out by themselves.	48	20	12
The teacher responds positively to making mistakes.	22	32	26

## II.4. Current Practices

Description (Five characteristics)	Not observed	A little	A lot
<b>Social interaction</b>			
The children share ideas, have interactions, collaborate, and communicate.	25	41	14
The teacher allows and encourages children to speak out during interaction moments and activities and responds positively to ideas expressed by the children.	14	40	25
The teacher allows and encourages children to interact with each other.	15	53	11
<b>Joyful</b>			
The children experience pleasure, motivation, surprise, thrill, etc...	12	49	18
The teacher integrates moments of fun and pride in the activity.	17	40	21
The children show a relaxed, open, friendly, positive behavior	8	48	24
<b>Meaningful</b>			
The teacher uses the interests of the children to expand the theme or activities.	49	21	10
The teacher harvests ideas from children.	46	20	14
The teacher responds to observed needs and interests of children with meaningful impulses.	60	12	8

The level of student engagement was also measured in the KAP survey, which included five questions on the topic (see Table 8). The results show that, according to the teachers, learners are very attentive, ask questions and often raise their hand to respond to teachers' questions. Asking questions and responding by raising hands is a very popular

teaching practice in Vietnam. Learners' autonomy and voice seem, however, rather poor. According to two thirds of the teachers, learners do not often have the chance to make decisions in the classroom and only seldomly share their concerns, whether personal or academic. These results are largely in line with the findings of the classroom observations. Only four

teachers allowed their learners to select between activities, while there were only two and three classes respectively in which we observed students setting goals or developing rules for an activity. The statistics from classroom observation and case study below shows poor quality of student participation in the lessons.

*Table 8: Frequency of classroom interaction by primary school teachers in percentage (N=320, KAP questionnaire)*

To what extent do pupils:	Not at all	A little	A lot
Pay attention	0.3	9.4	90.3
Ask questions	0.6	35.3	64.1
Raise hand	0	8.8	91.3
Make decisions	15.6	60	24.4
Share academic concerns	6.3	60.3	33.4
Share personal concerns	4.7	65.3	30



During a school visit in Hanoi on 8 June, we observed a teacher who was well prepared and had included several games to play during the lesson. The class started really well; children were actively participating. They seemed enthusiastic and were eager to answer.

However, involvement decreased as the lesson progressed. The games the teacher had prepared were completely teacher-led. Students had to sit still and follow instructions. Then the teacher would ask a question and select a single student to answer. Whereas most students were eager to participate in the beginning, their frustration grew as they did not get a chance to answer. Towards the end of the lesson, they lost interest – one student even fell asleep.

This case study shows that Learning through Play is not about just playing games. Play-based activities have to be designed in a way that allows for all students to participate and engage.

## II.4. Current Practices

### 2.4.2. LtP activities

As part of the KAP survey, teachers indicated how often they use a set of playful activities, including corner work (also called stations), small group work (4-5 learners), role play or theatre, experiments, quizzes, free reading (learners can choose what to read), math games, puzzles, free art (learners can choose what to create), story writing, free play, educational computer games and outdoor activities. The survey also gauged what materials teachers would like to use for learning (e.g. books, creative materials, toys, work sheets, flashcards and housekeeping items) using a three-point scale (Yes, I would use; No, I would not use; Not sure).

#### Small group work is the most popular play-based learning activity among primary school teachers.

72.5% of primary school teachers in the survey uses small group work daily. Another 21.6% uses it at least a few times per week. The class observations confirm these findings. All teachers that were observed implemented group work, although groups vary in size. In Hanoi, teachers often make pairs because

of space limitations, whereas teachers in the other provinces put together groups of 4 to 5 learners. Group work appeared particularly engaging in those schools that were part of the escuela nueva program.

**Other often-used learning activities include free reading, role play/theatre, quizzes, math games, free art and free play – over 50% of teachers use these activities at least a few times a week.** Games that teachers often use include ‘golden bell ringing’ whereby learners need to ring a bell as fast as possible to answer, classic quizzes (đố bạn), and ‘electronic line’ (truyền điện)<sup>1</sup>.

**Story writing, computer games and corner work are rare;** respectively 58.1%, 40.3% and 34.7% of teachers has never used these activities. From the classroom observations and the interviews, we know that computer games are seldom used because of the poor ICT infrastructure and teachers’ lack of ICT skills. Story writing, on the other hand, would be too time demanding.

Table 9: Percentage of primary school teachers (N=320) making use of

Activity	Every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never
Corner work	14.4	18.8	15.3	16.9	34.7
Small group work	72.5	21.6	4.4	0.6	0.9
Role play/ theatre	19.7	49.4	18.8	6.3	5.9
Experiments	23.1	20.6	24.7	18.1	13.4
Quizzes	38.1	35.6	17.8	5.9	2.5

(1) Electric line is a game often used to review lessons of mathematics. A first student chooses a number, then gives a hand to the next person, who chooses a second number, the third person must calculate the result.

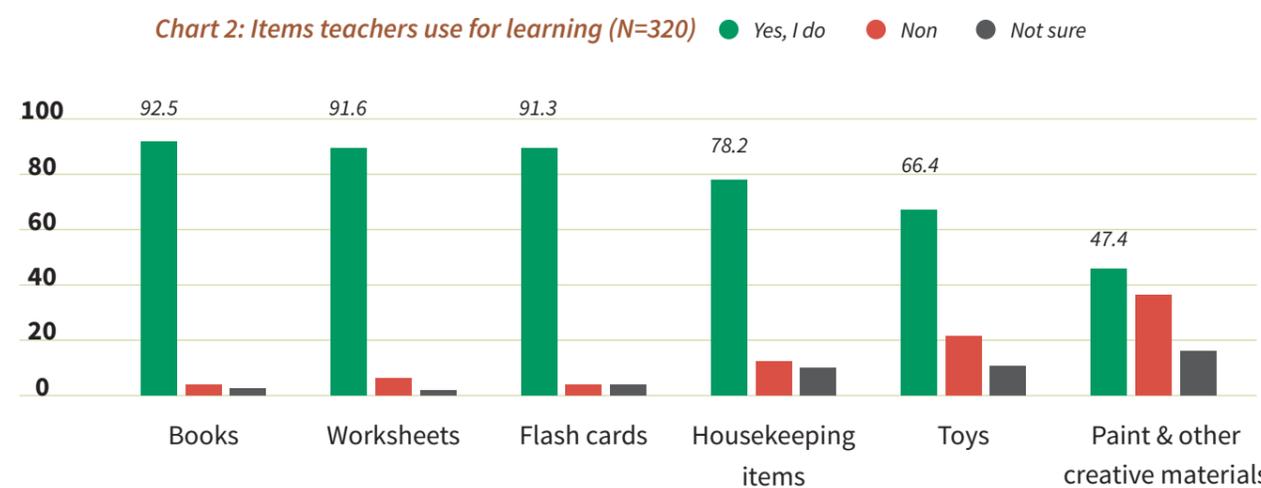
Activity	Every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never
Free reading	41.9	25.3	15.6	6.9	10.3
Math games	39.1	31.3	14.4	2.5	12.8
Puzzles	10.3	35.3	30.9	10.6	12.8
Free art	17.2	38.1	23.4	10.9	10.3
Story Writing	1.6	7.8	12.8	19.7	58.1
Free Play	41.3	18.4	13.1	12.8	14.4
Educational computer games	11.3	19.7	16.9	11.9	40.3
Outdoor activities	17.8	28.4	22.8	17.2	13.8

Cells highlighted in grey represent activities that at least 50% of teachers implements at least a few times per week. Cells highlighted in red indicate the three least implemented activities.

### 2.4.3. Infrastructure and LtP resources

In addition to teaching practices, observers also rated the classroom environment in terms of infrastructure and available resources. It follows that most classrooms are not adequate for organizing group work. Only 15 settings enabled moving desks to organize group work. Alarmingly, less than half of the observed classes (32) were deemed rich in playful learning materials, such as story books, posters, and games. Unfortunately, 47 out of 80 observed teachers did not display students’ artwork and other learning products.

With respect to teaching and learning materials, teachers showed great openness to all types of materials. Teachers particularly favor the use of more traditional resources, such as books (92.5%), work sheets (91.6%), flashcards (91.3%), and to a lesser extent housekeeping items (78.4%) and toys (66.4%). Creative materials, such as paint, are the least favored resources in the list.



## II.5. Building a support system for LtP

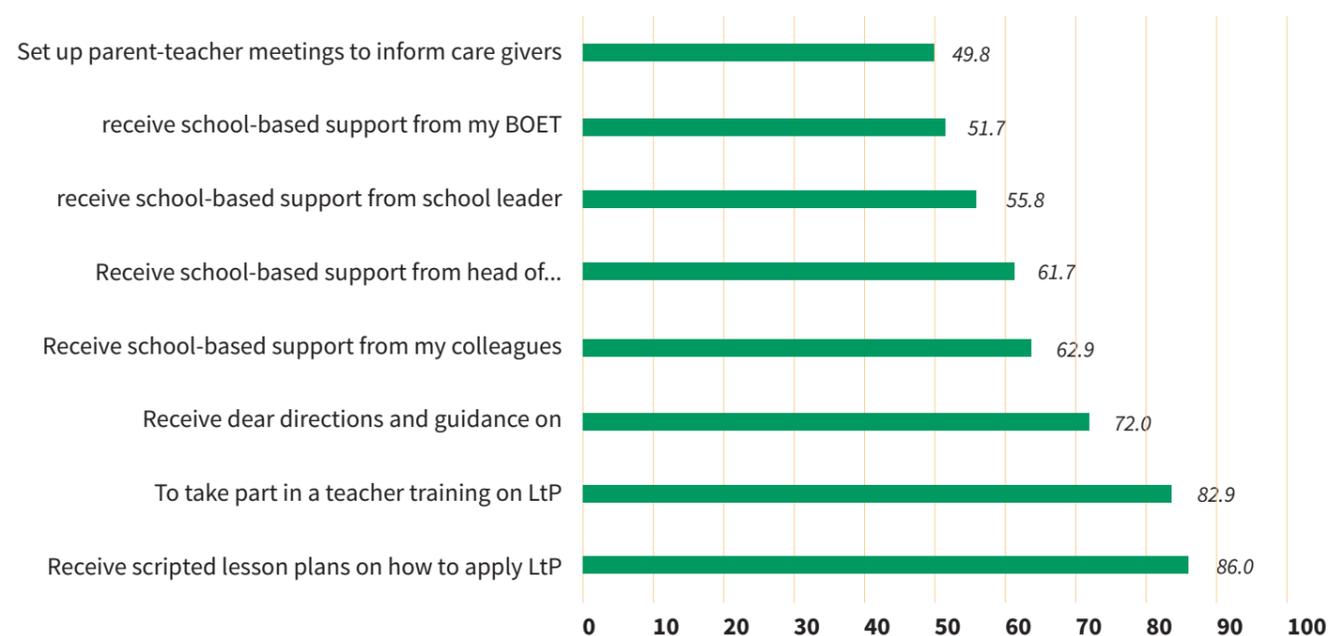
**Currently, there is no teacher professional development available on LtP.** So far, LtP is perceived as a recommended practice, rather than a mandatory practice: “We do not require teachers to apply LtP but we always recommend it” (Source: Education Official D13, Hanoi city). LtP is also not integrated into schools’ development or implementation plans.

**If such training would be available, however, 83.1% of teachers surveyed would participate.** Overall, teachers show a great willingness to take part in activities that would help them to become confident implementers of LtP. Graph 3 visualizes teachers’ support for a set of support activities.

**According to the KAP survey results, teachers**

**would welcome most the development of scripted lessons plans on how to apply LtP (85.9%),** which is followed by teacher training (83.1%) and clear directions and guidance (for instance planning and scheduling) on how to introduce play-based activities from their school leadership (72.2%). About two thirds of the teachers would also like to receive school-based support from their colleagues or from their head of department. About 50% of teachers welcome support from school leaders and education officials. Half of teachers, furthermore, thinks it would be useful to set up parent-teacher meetings to inform caregivers about LtP at school.

Chart 3: Percentage of teachers want to take part in support activities to integrate LtP (N=320)



## II.6. LtP at home

**According to the interviewees parents who have a higher education degree, and those living in urban areas, spend more time playing with their children at home and supporting their education:** “Now, parents in rural areas rarely play with their children. Parents in the city play with their kids more than parents who live in rural, they often take children go to parks or playing with them. Really need encourage parents play with children and make toys or play materials with their child” (Source: Quang Tri WU, Code E20). Mothers, moreover, would spend more time with their children than fathers

Respondents shared that gender consideration should be mainstreamed in LtP activities and materials to ensure that caregivers understand that playing with children is a responsibility of both men and women or father, and mothers. Gender considerations should be an important part in training courses on LtP for teachers. From real experience in raising awareness for community, WU strongly recommend that gender norms should exclude in organizing play-based activities. “I want the Project should pay more attention on gender issues. As I observed in the classroom of my daughter, female teachers seem attention boys rather than girls. Male teachers’ pay attention to female students more

than male students. It is imbalance treatment. Then children will make comparisons. So, I would like to recommend the Project should include gender issues in training and communication as well” (Source: WU, code D29, Da Nang city).

**Organizing parent-teacher meetings could help to raise awareness on the importance of play to learning, both in school as at home.** Although only half of surveyed teachers (49.7%) is in favor of setting up such meetings, education officials strongly recommend doing so. Parent-teacher meetings are the main channel to develop and maintain relationship between parents and schools. Usually, these meetings occur once or twice a year.

**In addition to parent-teacher meetings, the Women Union could integrate LtP in its parent club activities at commune level.** According to the Thai Nguyen Women’s Union, teachers should proactively reach out to the Women’s Union to encourage play at home as a part of their activities.

**Gender considerations in integrating LtP progress at home and schools is important issues that WU strongly raised.**



## PART 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The current study examined primary school teachers', school leaders', education officials' and caregivers' level of knowledge of, their attitudes towards, and their current practices regarding learning through play (LtP) in the framework of the introduction of a new competency-based curriculum for primary education in Vietnam. The study was conducted across 40 schools in the provinces of Hanoi, Danang, Quang Tri and Thai Nguyen.

The study is part of the “*Integrating Play-based Learning Activities among Young Learners*” (iPLAY) project (2019-2023) of WOB - education for development. Within the framework of iPLAY, WOB supports the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to achieve the objectives of this new curriculum by developing primary school teachers' attitudes, knowledge and competencies to implement Learning through Play (LtP)-pedagogies

through a combination of national in-service trainings and school-based Teacher Professional Development (TPD).

**The study shows that teachers, school leaders, education officials and caregivers support the implementation of LtP in the classroom, primarily because they want children to enjoy attending school.** Having a positive attitude towards LtP is very promising for the effective implementation of the iPLAY project.

**Yet, their understanding of LtP is fragmented.** Most caregivers, first, think of play in contrast to learning – a view a minority of teachers, school leaders and education officials shared. And nearly all respondents believed that LtP should be teacher-led, hence disregarding the importance of learners' agency and autonomy. Indeed, 91% of

teachers believe play-based activities should be led by the teacher if they are to be educational and 91.5% agree that teachers should be in control in the classroom. The study also shows that the characteristics of 'iteration' and 'meaningfulness' are poorly understood. Hence, there is a need to deepen and widen teachers', school leaders', officials' and caregivers' understanding of the theories, models, and principles of LtP in the primary classroom.

In terms of LtP practicing among primary schools, the study showed that although **play based activities are being applied in primary school, this method is not deeply integrated in subjects and schools.** 90% of primary teachers confirmed that they use play activities for learning purposes every day; 72.5% teachers use group work every day. Yet, qualitative data shows that play-based activities are rather rare and mostly applied in special cases such as outstanding teacher competitions or demonstration lessons. Important LtP activities such as corner work are, for instance, never used.

**In terms of student participation, data reveals similar patterns.** While 90% of teachers reported that their students are actively participating in class, the observations showed that student involvement was rather poor, with nearly all activities being teacher-led.

While there are currently no opportunities for teacher professional development on LtP, teachers indicate a great willingness to take part in professional development activities. Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Provide teacher training on LtP;
- Integrate LtP into school-based TPD activities, such as peer-to-peer coaching and joint lesson planning (school level) and verify their effectiveness in the daily teaching practice.
- Integrate LtP activities into the school year implementation plan, including parent-teacher meetings (school level);
- Set up a sustainable system of support across levels (class-school-district-province-national ministry), whereby officials provide coaching and mentoring.

**Apply an inclusive lens:** Play does not discriminate. It is important to encourage learners to engage in all kinds of play, without being hindered by gender stereotypes, disabilities, or language. To this end, it is recommended to develop an accessibility and participation checklist for LtP activities. It is equally important to encourage all adults, men, and women, to engage in play with their children – currently, mainly mothers engage in play.

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VVOB – education for development is a non-profit development organisation working towards inclusive quality education in nine countries. Through capacity development of ministries of education, we strengthen the professional development of teachers and school leaders in a sustainable way. We focus on early childhood, primary and general secondary education, and on secondary technical and vocational education. Gender is an important dimension to all our activities.

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