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**The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools:  
An Interpretive Study**

**By:**

**Nordiana Zakir**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Social Science  
School of Education  
The University of Sheffield

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## **ABSTRACT**

The overall aim of this research is to understand the change processes in teaching and learning that are going on in the Brunei government's preschools. The study also aims to find out the Bruneian preschool teachers' and children's teaching and learning experiences in the preschool classes at this exciting and challenging time of curriculum reform. The study also observed how teachers are developing their lessons and implementing reform processes informed by the expected pedagogical practice, and how children are learning in class, taking into account their experiences. A further aim of this study is to find out, at the ministerial level (the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and the Curriculum Department Unit), the expectations in terms of the change processes as these occur, and how the preschool teachers are supported. To achieve the aims, 123 teachers completed the questionnaire, four teachers and eight children were involved in observations and interviews, and two senior education officers were interviewed. The Brunei education policy has good intentions of trying to bring in different ideas but the journey from policy to practice is not a linear process. This study showed there are dislocations between how policy is conceptualised and how policy is enacted in ECCE settings; in particular there are specific actions that need to happen at the macro, meso and micro levels. There are certain change processes that need to happen for the policy-practice interface to be more coherent. This study aims to understand the layers of complexity involved in the change processes prescribed for the Brunei preschool education system. No curriculum reform can succeed without teachers' input and their active constructive participation. The issue is not simply about changing the curriculum or transforming the education landscape at preschools in Brunei; it also involves teachers' modes of thinking, their communicative approaches and their professional identities.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This study entitled: “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study” investigates the impact of change processes in four selected government preschools in Brunei Darussalam (henceforth called Brunei). A group of four preschool teachers, eight preschool children and two officers from the Ministry of Education will be included in this study. The impact of change processes on these participants will be explored in this research project. This first chapter outlines the rationale, purpose, significance and implications of the study, as well as the terminology used in this research.

### **1.2. Rationale of the study**

In this era of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalisation, many countries have introduced reforms to their national education systems, along with changes to their early childhood education services and policies. These initiatives are implemented to enable the countries to strive towards providing an education experience of a high quality. Policy developments in many countries have been motivated by the increase of financial support to improve the ‘quality of provision and raising expectations for children’s achievements’ (Wood, 2013a, p. 45). This increase in financial support means that preschool education has come to the top of educational agendas in many different countries including Singapore, China, England, Sweden, Australia and South Korea. If we look back ten years, we might not have found the same attention given to preschool education that we are finding in whatever region of the world we are looking at today. On the one hand this is a positive agenda for preschool education but on the other hand, it has brought a number of challenges to the field.

As the national early childhood education curriculum changes, teachers across many levels will be experiencing new challenges in their everyday pedagogical practices as they attempt to adjust and adapt to the new demands of the curriculum. For the newly trained early childhood educators, this situation may be seen as only a slight change to their practice, but to the senior early childhood educators this ongoing shift requires them to adjust to a whole new system with which they may be unfamiliar.

Educational change remains a deeply problematic area for policy makers and teachers, as it is a dynamic, living and challenging process (Broadhead and Burt, 2012; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley and Miller, 2012; Wood, 2013a). All the countries mentioned above are striving towards the same aim of upgrading their national curricula and policies for the purposes of maintaining economic sustainability and for providing high quality education (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Jolly et al., 2012; Mundia, 2012; Pearson and Rao, 2006; Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg and Vuorinen, 2011). Brunei is not being left behind in the educational changes that are going on internationally; the country upgraded its national curriculum in 2009, with the introduction of the SPN21 concept. Embedded with it is the early childhood education curriculum.

In 2007, Brunei introduced a new national education system called ‘The National Education System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, often abbreviated to SPN21. The system’s introduction brought many changes towards improving the teaching and learning experiences for all students from the preschool, primary, secondary and higher education levels. For the purpose of this study, I will only look at the Brunei preschool education system, as that is the main focus of this research. The introduction and implementation of SPN21 brought with it a series of major transformations within the preschool landscape; for example: pedagogical approaches, classroom settings and an increase of parental involvement in their children’s education. The new curriculum recognises the different learning abilities and learning styles of students, as well as encouraging schools to create effective learning environments that support play-based approaches.

The Brunei National Vision 2035, also known as *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, has included an education strategy where the government will invest in early childhood education. This strategy is consistent with wider international trends towards investment in preschool education (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Gray, 2012b; Wood, 2013a).

My own situation is relevant here: as a lecturer in early childhood education (henceforth called ECE), I am living with, and responsible for, some of these changes and the impact that they are having a) at different levels of the education system, and b) on different stakeholders. I am personally motivated to understand what is involved in the processes of change in teaching and learning within the Brunei preschool education, in

the contexts of both theory and practice. Hence this study, albeit undertaken in one country, can contribute to understanding change processes in ECE teaching and learning taking place in other systems.

### **1.3. Purposes of the research**

There are five purposes of this research:

1. to conceptualise educational change processes in the Brunei preschool education system;
2. to identify how the Brunei preschool teachers use their capacity and pedagogical knowledge in planning their lessons, organising the learning environment and implementing the curriculum in their settings;
3. to understand the Brunei preschool teachers' perspectives and experiences of change processes in the Brunei preschool education system;
4. to understand how the Brunei preschool children perceive their learning experiences;
5. to understand what the Ministry of Education senior officers are expecting from the teachers and children, in tracking the progress of change.

### **1.4. Research aims and questions**

The overall aim of this research is to understand the change processes in teaching and learning that are going on in the Brunei government's preschools. The study also aims to find out the Bruneian preschool teachers' and children's teaching and learning experiences in the preschool classes at this exciting and challenging time of curriculum reform. The study will also a) observe how teachers are developing their lessons and implementing reform processes to fit in with the expected pedagogical practice, and b) how children are learning in class, taking into account their experiences. A further aim is to find out from the ministerial level officers (members of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and the Curriculum Department Unit) what are their expectations in terms of the change processes as these occur, and how the preschool teachers are being supported as they implement those changes.

To achieve the aims, the research questions that guide this research are as follows:

1. What are the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool education system?

2. In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?
3. How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, in organising the environment, and in implementing the curriculum?
4. How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?
5. What are the Ministry of Education senior officers' perspectives regarding teachers and children in monitoring the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools?

### **1.5. Significance of the study**

The significance of this study is to highlight the importance of hearing the voices of the Brunei preschool education system's stakeholders in constructing future change processes in teaching and learning. This investigation will also help to understand the stakeholders' experiences throughout the change processes. In addition, the study will add both literature and understanding to the ECE field, with a snapshot of what the Brunei preschool education system is going through and how it is adapting to the SPN21 education system.

### **1.6. Implication of the study**

The implication of this study is to provide insights into the educational change processes that are happening at the Brunei preschool education level from the perspectives of theory, policy and practice. The study will also help inform policy makers to create or administer the Brunei preschool education system, based on the voices of the children and teachers with regards to the current system. This study seeks to enable future plans to include, where appropriate, the voices of those stakeholders. The research findings will also attempt to inform and produce effective ways or systems for managing future changes towards a high-quality Brunei preschool education system, as well as identifying potential improvements in ECE training programmes at higher education level.

## **1.7. Terminology**

i) The term ‘preschool’ in this study refers to children at the age of five to six years of age, attending one-year pre-primary education in a Brunei government school.

ii) The term ‘teachers’, in this study, refers to the preschool teachers in the Brunei context.

iii) The term ‘senior officers’ in this study refers to the officers at the Ministry of Education who are directly involved with the policy makers.

iv) The term ‘Pra’ in this study refers to the Malay word for preschool which is equivalent to reception year or kindergarten three.

## **1.8. Thesis structure**

This thesis comprises of seven chapters.

Chapter 1 has provided an outline of the rationale, purpose and significance of the study, together with its research aims and questions and the terminologies used in ECE in Brunei. Chapter 2 provides brief background information about Brunei’s culture and education system.

Chapter 3 presents the literature review relating to: a) matters of ECE reforms, teachers’ competencies, b) pedagogical approaches in ECE, and c) challenges with policy reforms in highlighting the phenomena of the dynamics of education change in ECE in Brunei.

Chapter 4 sets out the methodology adopted in this study, which is a mixed methods approach using an open-ended questionnaire, observation, interviews and documents.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the teachers, the children and the senior officers with regards to the impact of change processes in teaching and learning in the Brunei preschools. Chapter 6 presents the discussion of the findings that are presented in Chapter 5, by integrating data collected from the open-ended questionnaire, interviews, observations and document analysis.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents the recommendations and conclusion of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: BRUNEI**

### **2.1. Introduction**

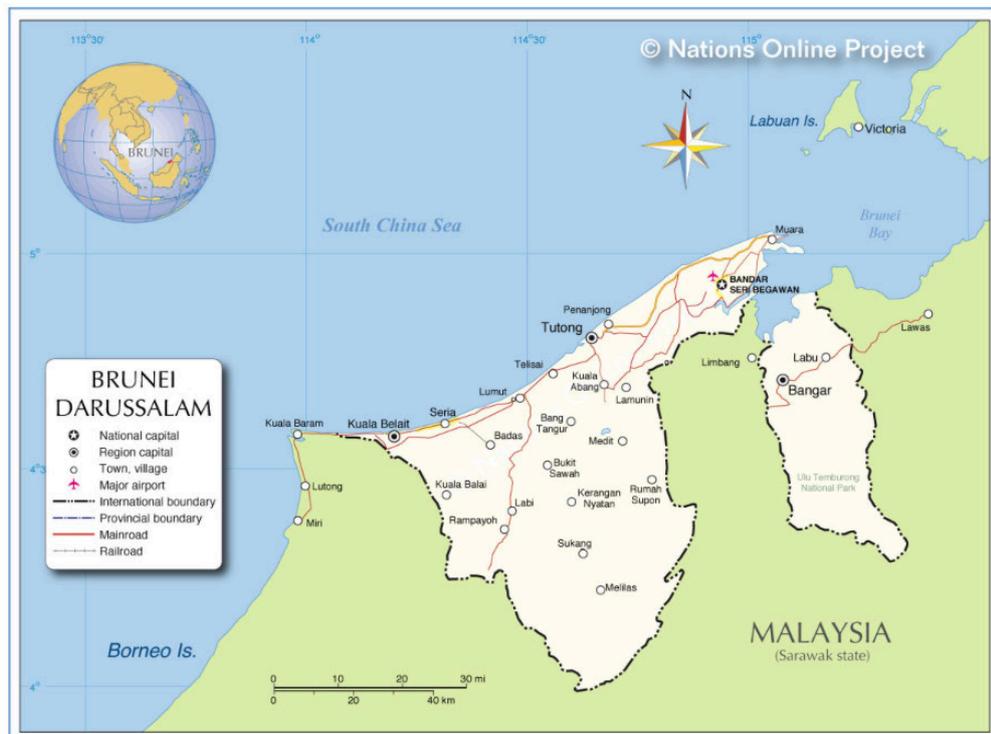
This chapter provides background information to the Brunei context of this research, in order to provide a brief introduction to the country. In Chapter 2 the following issues will receive attention: a) the Brunei National Vision 2035, b) the National Education System for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, c) the Brunei preschool education curriculum, d) the transformation towards improving services for Brunei preschool education under SPN21, e) the cultural context of Brunei's drive to improve preschool education, f) creating a career as a Pra teacher, and g) the analysis of policy changes in the Brunei preschool education system.

### **2.2. Brief information about Brunei**

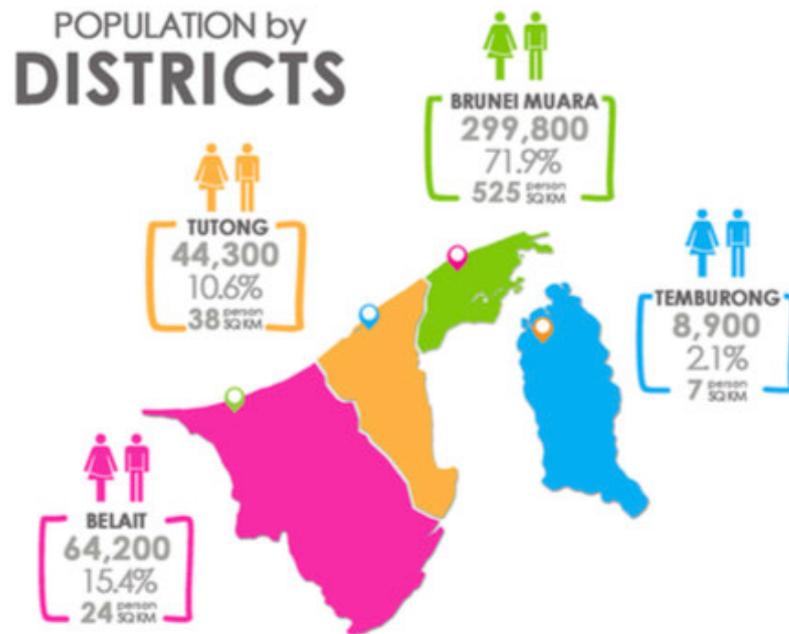
Brunei Darussalam means 'The Abode of Peace', although the name is often abbreviated to 'Brunei' during every day communication. Brunei is a sovereign independent country, headed by His Majesty, The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam. Brunei is located in South East Asia on the Island of Borneo; sharing its border with the Malaysian State of Sarawak. Brunei covers an area of 5765 square kilometres and has an equatorial climate with an average temperature of 28° Celsius. Brunei has four districts: i) Brunei-Muara, ii) Tutong, iii) Belait and iv) Temburong. The capital city of Brunei is Bandar Seri Begawan, which is in the Brunei-Muara district. In order to provide a clear picture of Brunei's location, Figure 2.1 (below) shows the map of South East Asia, with Figure 2.2, showing the map of Brunei with the four main districts. According to the Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook (2015), the Brunei-Muara district is densely populated (71.9%) as the central government and major commercial areas are located in this district. The population, by districts, is illustrated in Figure 2.3; the other three districts are accessible by road and the furthest district, which is Belait, can be reached within two hours by car. In 2015 the Department of Economic Planning and Development recorded the statistics for Brunei: a) GDP per capita was BND 42,612.7, b) GDP (BND million) of BND 18.6 billion and c) with a GDP growth rate of 0.4% annually. Since the discovery of oil and gas in 1929, these natural resources have been the major source of income and revenue for Brunei's economy. The average crude oil production for 2015 was 126.8 thousand barrels per day.



**Figure 2.1. Map of South East Asia**  
 Source: Central Intelligence Agency



**Figure 2.2. Map of Brunei Darussalam**  
 Source: One World Nations online (2017)



**Figure 2.3. Population by districts**  
**Source: Department of economic planning and development (2016)**

In 2017 Brunei had a population of 435,640 people comprising a multi racial society made up of 65% Malays, 10.1% Chinese and 23.9% of a mixture of different races, including indigenous ethnic groups, and expatriates. Malay is the official language of Brunei, with English being widely spoken; various other languages are used, such as in the Chinese and Indian communities. Some schools and higher learning institutions use Arabic as part of their specialist curriculum. Brunei is no longer a bilingual country as it has moved to become a multilingual nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although it is stated that Brunei’s official language is Malay (the standard Malay; Bahasa Melayu), Bruneians learn to speak English and Arabic as compulsory language in schools and these media are used in major school assessments. The medium of delivery in Pra is mostly in Malay, with the introduction of the English language in Year One, which then progresses through to tertiary level, where the main language medium of instruction is English. However, there is an exception to this model, for in religious schools the main media of instruction are not only Malay but also Arabic. Furthermore, some Bruneians may have additional language, such as Mandarin Chinese, which had been learnt in other schools, or even other countries. Hence, typically, the Malay Bruneians speak an additional Malay dialect, such as the Bruneian Malay dialect, which is actually understood by most Bruneians. Many of the population will also be able to converse and write in standard Malay (Bahasa Melayu), and English; an ability which makes Bruneians members of a

multilingual society. The typical Chinese Bruneians are also considered to be multilingual as they can speak the Bruneian Malay dialect, the standard Malay, Chinese dialect either Mandarin, Hokkien and/or others, as well as English. This plural linguistic situation is also evident from some of the road signs found in Brunei, which are written in Malay, English and Arabic. The official religion of Brunei is Islam, and about 67% of the population are Muslim. Brunei takes its religion seriously, but also exercises religious tolerance where other faiths (13% Buddhist, 10% Christian and others, including 10% with indigenous beliefs) are accepted. (Department of Economic Planning and Development, 2016).

Brunei was under British Protection from 1888, until its independence was gained on the 1st January, 1984. His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah is the head of state and head of Government of Brunei and is the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei. His Majesty is also Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. His Majesty is also the Supreme Executive Authority in Brunei Darussalam. The Sultan is assisted by the Privy Council, the Council of Succession, the Religious Council, the Council of Ministers and the Legislative Council in performing his duties. His Majesty retains the final say in decision-making.

Brunei is an Islamic Malay state that practices the ideology of the Malay Islamic Monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*, MIB) and incorporates it to inform the ways of daily life and thinking. This is a uniquely Bruneian blend of the Malay traditions as the roots of the country and is at the heart of Brunei. MIB also incorporates strong influences of Malay culture, stressing the importance of using Islam as guidance in one's daily life and governance, and respecting the monarch, His Majesty, the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan. MIB also emphasises tolerance, where people are free to practice other cultures and religions. This respect for others makes it clear that in all aspects in governmental policies and daily practice, Islamic values must be present and instilled amongst the Bruneians, both at work and at home. Any decision-making will need to adhere to the concept of MIB in order to maintain Bruneian traditions, as well as cultural and religious values. This 'model for living' is common in Brunei, where extended families live close to each other or even within the same dwelling place. In this way, the younger generations can look after the elders, as the responsibility of looking after and caring for the elderly rests

with the family. Any developmental progress focusing on the country's efforts to modernise will need, and be expected, to comply with the teachings of Islam in order for it to be accepted in Brunei; such developments will therefore be seen as relevant to the Malay culture and the governing of the Monarch. Like other Islamic states, Brunei has embedded its culture and religion into the shaping of both policy and practice.

According to the World Factbook (2017), in 2015 Brunei's total population for literacy rates was 96%, with male 97.5% and female 94.5%. Statistics from the Ministry of Education (2015), presents that there were 176 schools/colleges/institutions under the government, as indicated in Table 2.1 (below). Meanwhile, Table 2.2 (below) shows the total number of students enrolled in government schools as 77,420; while 36,567 students were enrolled in private schools. The total number of teachers in the government schools in the same year (2015) was 8,580, with another 2,399 teachers employed in private schools (see Table 2.3). The lessons are delivered in either the Malay or English languages.

**Table 2.1. Number of schools by sector and level of education**

Sector and Level of Education	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Government</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>176</b>
Pre-Primary/Primary/Preparatory	123	125	125	123
Secondary	38	38	39	39
Technical/Vocational	9	9	9	9
Tertiary	5	5	5	5
<b>Private</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>78</b>
Pre-Primary/ Primary/ Secondary	79	74	76	73
Technical/Vocational	2	3	3	3
Tertiary	2	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>254</b>
Preparatory/Secondary	240	237	240	235
Technical/Vocational	11	12	12	12
Tertiary	7	7	7	7

Source: Ministry of Education (2015)

**Table 2.2. Number of students in government and private sector by level of education**

<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>117,286</b>	<b>116,255</b>	<b>116,168</b>	<b>113,987</b>
<b>Government Schools</b>	<b>82,331</b>	<b>81,092</b>	<b>79,075</b>	<b>77,420</b>
<b>Preschools</b>	<b>3,285</b>	<b>2,961</b>	<b>3,052</b>	<b>3,046</b>
Primary/Preparatory	26,819	26,005	24,962	24,477
Secondary	34,303	32,654	31,937	31,018
Sixth Form (Pre-University)	6,025	6,102	5,165	4,647
Technical/Vocational	4,311	4,900	3,667	4,041
Tertiary	7,588	8,470	10,292	10,191
<b>Private</b>	<b>34,955</b>	<b>35,163</b>	<b>37,093</b>	<b>36,567</b>
<b>Preschools</b>	<b>9,810</b>	<b>10,073</b>	<b>10,324</b>	<b>10,255</b>
Primary/Preparatory	15,934	16,085	16,116	15,920
Secondary	5,722	5,675	5,832	5,659
Sixth Form (Pre-University)	382	446	453	411
Technical/Vocational	1,653	1,793	1,955	1,473
Tertiary	1,454	1,091	2,413	2,849

**Source: Ministry of Education (2015)**

**Table 2.3. Number of teachers in government and private sector by level of education**

<b>Level of Education and Sex</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Government schools</b>	<b>8,583</b>	<b>8,499</b>	<b>8,572</b>	<b>8,580</b>
Male	2,723	2,616	2,631	2,656
Female	5,860	5,883	5,941	5,954
<b>Preschool</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>234</b>
Male	14	7	17	13
Female	233	198	242	221
<b>Primary/Preparatory</b>	<b>3,008</b>	<b>2,955</b>	<b>2,905</b>	<b>2,873</b>
Male	775	727	726	698
Female	2,233	2,228	2,179	2,175
<b>Secondary/Sixth Form (Pre-University)</b>	<b>4,136</b>	<b>4,157</b>	<b>4,176</b>	<b>4,187</b>
Male	1,308	1,271	1,245	1,237
Female	2,828	2,886	2,931	2,950
<b>Technical/Vocational</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>551</b>
Male	273	269	286	262
Female	262	270	280	289
<b>Tertiary</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>735</b>
Male	353	342	357	416
Female	304	301	309	319
<b>Private Schools</b>	<b>2,319</b>	<b>2,353</b>	<b>2,324</b>	<b>2,399</b>
Male	473	505	507	494
Female	1,846	1,848	1,817	1,905
<b>Preschool</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>545</b>
Male	44	10	15	19
Female	672	472	512	526
<b>Primary/Preparatory</b>	<b>1,030</b>	<b>1,135</b>	<b>1,099</b>	<b>1,160</b>
Male	205	221	207	217
Female	825	914	892	943
<b>Secondary/Sixth Form (Pre-University)</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>517</b>
Male	182	211	219	190
Female	281	374	307	327
<b>Technical/Vocational</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>
Male	13	28	30	28
Female	45	51	61	64
<b>Tertiary</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>
Male	29	35	36	40
Female	23	37	45	45

**Source: Ministry of Education (2015)**

### **2.3. Development of the Brunei preschool education system before SPN21**

As mentioned earlier Brunei was under British Protection in 1888, but the Brunei system itself was never under direct British control and differed from other Malay states because of this. In 1912, Brunei started formal education which, over recent years, has evolved to meet local, regional and global challenges. The Department of Education in Brunei was created in 1949. Prior to this period, there was no unified policy towards education and the schools that did exist were limited in both their scope and the range of pupils they taught. The infrastructure of Brunei's present education system only dates from 1950; hence, the British education system has continued to influence Brunei's education model (Upex, 2006). The First National Development Plan (1954-1959) marked the draft of the first education policy which provided children, aged 6-14 years, with free education in Malay schools. In 1972, the education policy was changed, with free education being given for nine years; where previously it was only six years. Nine years of free education includes six years of primary education and three years of lower secondary education. (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The development of Brunei preschool education before 1990 involved three phases. Phase one was during the mid 1950s, where Chinese schools introduced preparatory classes, before students progressed to a Year One class. Phase two was between 1960-1978 when the term '*Prasekolah*' or 'kindergartens' became familiar, resulting from efforts by missionary schools and Brunei Shell. Towards the end of phase two, preschool education was wholly managed by private schools without supervision or input from the government. Under phase three, in 1979 the Brunei government prepared a budget allocation for preschool education. In the same year, the government also introduced compulsory schooling for all children aged five years, with the preschool classes, which are known locally today as *Prasekolah*, were known back then as Class Zero or *Darjah Kosong*. At that level, the curriculum focused more on the basic 3R skills, basic Islamic religious knowledge, civics, physical movement, singing and creativity development. In 1979, there were 102 primary schools that handled preschool education via 213 preschool classes involving 3989 students. Brunei's preschool education system caters for children aged between 5 and 6 years (Aisah, 2006). On 9 April 1984, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health introduced the 'Bilingual System of Education', right after Brunei reached its full independence in January, 1984;

a system that emphasises the use of both Malay and English language. The year 1985 records the implementation of the ‘bilingual education policy’ which was put in place to ensure learners attain proficiency in both Malay and English. This policy decision was made at the time when all government schools, from preschool until pre-university, used the same national curriculum. It was in 1992 that the policy was extended to private schools. In 1993, the 12-year education policy was introduced to replace the nine-year education policy. Under this 12-year education policy, seven years involved preschool and primary education, three years in lower secondary education and two years in upper secondary education or technical/vocational education. The ‘New Education Order’ was introduced in 2003 which emphasised that the formulation of Brunei’s education curriculum should be guided by the Malay Islamic Monarchy or *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) concept (Ministry of Education, 2013).

To date, the British influence is still present at year 11 level, where students are assessed by the Brunei Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (BC GCE O-Level) exam in order to move on to higher education and to sit for the Cambridge General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A-Level) in sixth form colleges. According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education (2015) presented earlier (see Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3), there are 123 government primary schools with 3,046 preschool children and 234 preschool teachers.

#### **2.4. Brunei National Vision 2035 (*Wawasan Brunei 2035*)**

According to the Department of Planning, Development and Research (2012), Brunei formulated a 30-year long term development framework in 2007 which comprises of the National Vision, the outline of Strategies and Policies for Development (OSPD) and the National Development Plan (RKN). This vision includes the voices of some Bruneians on what they hope the country will be like for the young generations in the future. Brunei’s National Vision is known as *Wawasan Brunei 2035*. The Ministry of Education (2012, p. 2) mentioned under this *Wawasan*, the aim is to make Brunei recognisable in three areas:

- i) Brunei is to have an educated and highly skilled people in accordance to international standards;
- ii) secondly, Brunei is to be in the top ten of the world’s nations in terms of quality of life and

iii) thirdly, Brunei is to be in the top ten countries in the world in terms of its economy and income per capita.

Therefore, there will be both continuity and changes in order to meet the social and economic developmental needs of Brunei.

It is inevitable that changes are needed in Brunei in order to further improve the country as a whole. Although those changes are needed, it is important for Brunei to uphold its core values that has been the foundation of its stability, harmony and prosperity. Any changes made shall be guided by the MIB concept at all times; a focus which will include: a) commitment to the monarchy and nation, b) belief in the values of Islam based on the *Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jemaah, Mazhaf Shafie* (the teachings of the Quran and the Prophets) and c) the tradition of compassion, tolerance and social harmony.

The Ministry of Education (2012) noted that to realise *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, both the public and private sectors need to work together to develop, coordinate and implement the national strategies. These strategies focus on eight areas as follows: i) education, ii) economy, iii) security, iv) institutional development, v) local business development, vi) infrastructure, vii) social security and viii) environmental strategy. The OSPD are responsible for planning the strategic directions for each area.

The Ministry of Education (2013) recognised that for Brunei's young people to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the modern world, the following eight policy directions, under the education strategy, will be pursued:

- 1) investing in early childhood education;
- 2) adopting international best practices in teaching and learning;
- 3) having first class secondary and tertiary education, including vocational schools;
- 4) strengthening the competency in info-communications technology (ICT) for students, teachers and educational administrators, including the integration of ICT into the schools' curricula;
- 5) devising programmes that promote life-long learning and widen access to higher education;

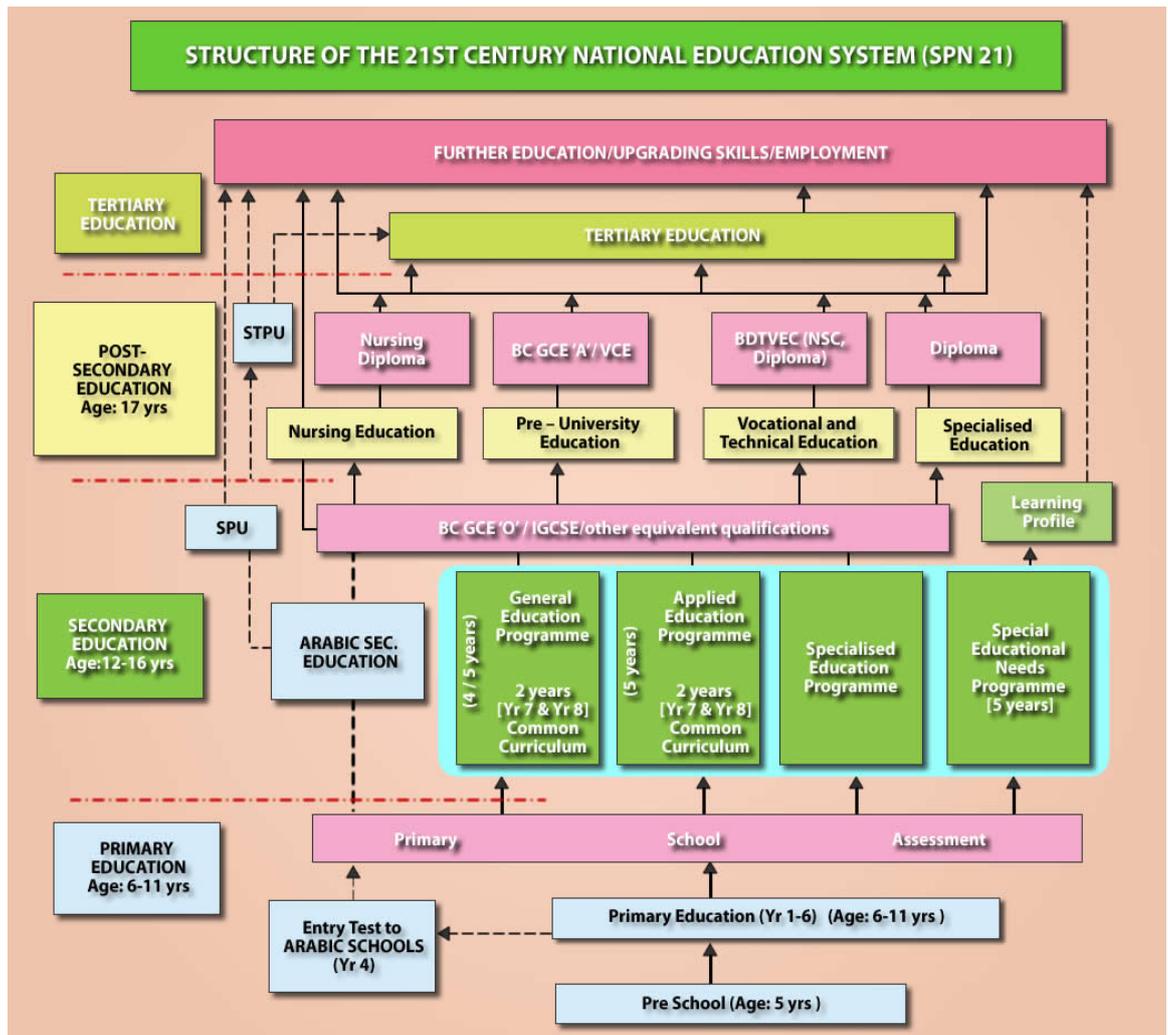
- 6) promoting research, development and innovation, both in government-funded institutions and through public-private and international partnerships;
- 7) adopting cost-effective methods of educating the Brunei people through the use of technology and
- 8) improving the management of all educational institutions (p. 19).

This education strategy is a significant initiative from the government, as investing in early childhood education has been taken into the national priority list for educational improvements. Investing in early childhood education has not just been newly added to the Brunei government list of 2007; its importance can be traced back to the early developments of preschool investment in 1979.

### **2.5. National education system for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, SPN21**

Brunei's Ministry of Education developed a strategic plan to cover the period 2007-2011, together with a strategic plan for 2012-2017, as decade long initiatives to improve the quality of the educational services provided in Brunei Darussalam. The Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan (2007-2011) is "a contextual framework for development to be undertaken by the Ministry of Education in order to provide and develop high quality education services for the future of the nation" (p. 4). The Ministry of Education (2007) mentioned in the Strategic Plan for 2007-2011, that the aim was to use learning as the catalyst to develop the nation. Thus, several strategies which could enhance learning and teaching process were outlined under that plan. These strategies include; a) all levels of education having flexible curricula, b) innovative training for teachers and c) using information communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the Strategic Plan 2007-2011 also emphasised the importance of creating a flexible education system which can cater to the children's needs. With that, the Strategic Plan 2007-2011 and the Strategic Plan 2012-2017 were the main driving forces towards a new national education system known as the 'National Education System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' or SPN21; an initiative which was introduced in 2009. Under SPN21, students will undergo four phases of schooling, namely: i) primary education (age 6-11 years), ii) secondary education (age 12-16 years), iii) post-secondary education (17 years) and finally, iv) tertiary education. Under this new structure, secondary level students will either complete a 4-year programme or a 5-year

programme before taking their GCE 'O' level examination. All secondary students in year 7 (Form 1) and Year 8 (Form 2) will use a common curriculum before they are channelled towards either a 'general education programme' or an 'applied education programme'. The structure of SPN21 is presented in Figure 2.4 (below) showing how SPN21 enables students to have multiple pathways for careers and higher education, based on their qualification eligibility.



**Figure 2.4. Structure of SPN21**  
Source: Ministry of Education (2012)

## 2.6. Preschool education in Brunei

Preschool education in Brunei was first introduced in 1979 and it is now compulsory for five-year-old children. Children in Brunei now start their formal schooling at the age of five, with the Brunei government currently catering for students as young as five years of age: the preschool level. Under the Compulsory Education Order 2007, children aged five years are considered to be at the compulsory age for starting school.

Currently, the government only provides educational services for preschool education at the age of five years. There are no government services for day care, nurseries, or playschools to cater for children from birth to four years, apart from health care services that are located outside of the education system. The Brunei government preschoolers have no prior experience of schooling, nursery or play group unless their parents have sent them to private, fee charging centres. Therefore, when most five-year olds enter preschool, it is their first school experience; designed in part to prepare and nurture them for academic development in the following year one. One of the aims of preschool in Brunei is preparing the children for school readiness, and hence providing them with school experience. The Brunei preschool classes are situated within the primary school, with preschool being a course of a year's duration. The young students start school in January and their initiation programme ends in December, an experience involving four school terms. The Brunei preschool children are mostly bilingual speakers, with their first language being Malay and their second language English.

### **2.7. The Brunei preschool education curriculum**

The Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan 2007-2011 and Strategic Plan 2012-2017 focused on the enhancement of the quality and efficiency of the nation's education and training systems. This aspect is the part of SPN21 that brings in further changes towards improving the teaching and learning experiences for all students from the preschool, primary, secondary and higher education levels. As the focus of this current research is on preschool education, I will focus solely on this part of the educational spectrum, in order to reveal further information relating to the transformations currently happening at that early level. Significant support and interest in pre-school education is a remarkable shift in focus exhibited by the Ministry of Education, as attention is now given to creating improvements in quality for early childhood care and education.

The updated preschool education curriculum identifies the different learning styles and abilities of students. It also encourages schools to create effective learning environments that support play-based approaches. Under this plan, the Ministry has also mandated the Compulsory Education Order 2007, presently fully in force. This is achieved through the enactment of s.56/57 of the *Compulsory Education Order 2007 CAP. 211* (Brunei), which mandated that every Brunei child residing in the country "above the age of six

years, who has not yet attained the age of 15 years” receive compulsory education for at least nine years.

## **2.8. Objectives of Brunei’s preschool curriculum**

The Brunei preschool curriculum is embedded under the national education system, SPN21 and has the following objectives:

- 1) To enhance the following developmental domains of the child:
  - a. Spiritual development.
  - b. Physical development.
  - c. Perception and sensory development.
  - d. Communication and language development.
  - e. Cognitive development.
  - f. Emotional development.
  - g. Social development.
- 2) Instilling Islamic values and morale in daily practice.
- 3) Enhancing reading, writing, counting and thinking skills.
- 4) To improve communication skills by using Malay as the official language.
- 5) To strengthen the basic use of the introduced English language.
- 6) To provide fun, wonderful opportunities and learning experiences.
- 7) To develop technology literacy skills through the use of ICT.
- 8) To build positive social attitudes amongst children.

## **2.9. Preschool curriculum concept**

In Brunei’s context, preschool education means an informal programme for children aged 5 years old with the aim of preparing those young children for daily living and preparation for formal education at the primary level. The Brunei preschool curriculum (2009, p. 2) states the preschool learning concept took into account foundations of Western preschool models and theories of learning such as Owen (UK), Pestalozzi (Switzerland), Froebel (Germany), and Montessori (Italy). There are several principles that have been taken into consideration in developing the preschool curriculum, including:

- 1) Early learning and development has many dimensions; developmental domains are extremely inter-related with one another.
- 2) All children have their own potential, regardless of their backgrounds. Children

need to be given the same opportunities and learning experiences in order to identify their capabilities, which can be their strengths.

- 3) Children have their own individual differences in terms of their development and capabilities.
- 4) Children show several skills and capabilities from each developmental learning domain, in accordance with their level.
- 5) Knowledge about children's development is important to enable the provision of optimal and meaningful learning experiences for the children.
- 6) Parents and family can and should play an important role in early childhood education.
- 7) Children learn actively through their own activities and teacher chosen activities.

## **2.10. Curriculum organisation**

Brunei's preschool curriculum (2009, p.3) has been planned and organised by using five different domains:

- 1) Personal and social development- moral values
- 2) Cognitive development- literacy, numeracy and science
- 3) Aesthetics and creative development- arts and crafts, singing, storytelling and drama
- 4) Physical development- health and safety, creative movement
- 5) Development of information and communications technology- introduction to ICT

Each of the domains has their own objectives and content standards. For example, the development of the information and communications technology domain provides knowledge about the foundations of technology to the children. For the objective, it stated that at the end of the preschool lesson, children would be able:

- 1) to have early exposure to ICT;
- 2) to know the basic functions of computers; and
- 3) to use computers as a fun and interactive learning tool.

As for the content standards, the preschool curriculum provides children with opportunities:

- 1) to show their curiosity and explore how computer functions;

- 2) to use different educational software that is appropriate for the learning contents.

### **2.11. The preschool education syllabus**

The preschool education syllabus (Brunei Preschool Curriculum, 2009, p.7) contains daily routines and learning activities. The children's daily routine begins as a whole process from the start of their learning, from the time they arrive at school, to the end of their school day. Some of the routines are:

- 1) give and answer greetings,
- 2) organize their shoes (put away their shoes),
- 3) queue before entering/exiting the classroom,
- 4) store bags and personal items,
- 5) recite prayer for studying, eating/drinking during break,
- 6) maintain self-cleanliness,
- 7) use the restroom correctly,
- 8) make sure the classroom is tidy and clean before going home.

The implementation of learning activities is prepared in accordance to the areas of learning and level of skills that are appropriate with the children's development, as mentioned earlier. The language medium used to deliver all developmental area material is Malay, except for English language study, during which English is the medium used.

### **2.12. Teaching themes**

There are 11 themes to be covered in one year in order to complete the preschool curriculum (Brunei Preschool Curriculum, 2009, p. 14). The themes are:

- 1) My school
- 2) Myself
- 3) My family
- 4) My house
- 5) Food and drink
- 6) Transportation
- 7) Clothing
- 8) Animals
- 9) Plants

10) Occupation(s)

11) Toys

### **2.13. Teaching strategy and approaches**

In the Brunei preschool curriculum (2009, p, 15), the preschool teaching strategy is through integration, centred on the learning and strategies of instilling values; particularly Islamic values. The teaching approach is based on the learning objectives that have been set, informed by theory and principles, such as:

- 1) from easy to difficult;
- 2) a cooperative approach, made ‘concrete’ by working together as a group;
- 3) an integrative approach;
- 4) a thematic approach;
- 5) learning through play approach.

It is important to note that these approaches are presented as stated here, without any statements that further explain each approach. The SPN21 preschool education curriculum framework in Brunei is given to teachers in a white A4 size file, which contains the introduction to SPN21, its framework within SPN21 in general and the preschool education curriculum itself. The document outlines: a) details of the objectives, b) the expected classroom layout, c) preschool schemes of work, and d) the eleven themes as a whole year’s syllabus. Also provided are brief examples of preschool schemes of work focusing on the integration of developmental domains into the teaching and learning process for preschool education.

With SPN21, the teacher’s role is expected to change from that of a traditional transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of learning. Despite the on-going change processes in the Brunei preschool education system, the Ministry of Education has placed great emphasis on the use of ‘*learning through play*’ in SPN21. MoE (2007) stated that the “Fun, Play and Learn More” approach to learning should be adopted into the Brunei preschool education (p. 22). This approach is not justified or strengthened by any explanatory statements. The Ministry of Education, Brunei, has also added learning through play into the preschool curriculum framework, as one of the appropriate teaching approaches for preschool education. Although there is emphasis on the use of ‘*learning through play*’ as one of the teaching approaches, the preschool curriculum has

generally been left without any attempts to inform the teachers regarding background information relating to the concept of ‘learning through play’. Critical issues such as: i) what is meant by ‘learning through play’, ii) its benefits, iii) ways of implementing ‘learning through play’, or iv) any information that can support teachers in understanding and implementing it have, in effect, been ignored, or at the very least, neglected. The term ‘child-centred approach’ is also used, but it too is left unexplained and open to interpretation by the teachers. Whilst the emphasis on preschool education has been recently highlighted through SPN21, that focus can be traced back to the early introduction of the preschool education system in Brunei in 1979. Now it would seem, at least in one sense, it will be up to today’s teachers to translate what that focus really involves in the classroom.

#### **2.14. Classroom management**

As extracted from the Brunei preschool education curriculum (2009, p. 15), classroom management is described as “well-maintained, attractive and conducive classroom environment that may stimulate the teaching and learning process”. The concepts of ‘learning corners’ and ‘learning areas’ play a significant preschool role. The MoE has suggested developments in two physical locations.

*Inside the classroom:*

- 1) Language corner
- 2) Mathematics corner
- 3) Science corner
- 4) ICT corner
- 5) Arts and crafts corner
- 6) Drama/singing corner
- 7) Enrichment corner
- 8) Blocks and manipulative corner

*Outside the classroom:*

- 1) Water area
- 2) Sand area
- 3) Outdoor play area

### **2.15. Allocated time**

For every lesson, there should not be division of subjects and specific allocated time for subjects. All lessons should be integrated, guided by the set of themes presented in Section 2.12 above. Teaching and learning begins at 7.30 in the morning and ends at 12 noon for the preschool level. This allocated time is not new for preschool education under SPN21, as it has been there since 1979.

### **2.16. Preschool assessment**

According to the Brunei preschool curriculum (2009, p. 16), formative and continuous assessment will be the model used for preschoolers. The daily process of teaching and learning is the aspect that is taken into account for assessment; a process that is carried out informally and done individually. The assessment procedures involve observing behaviours, evaluating children's work, and noting progress with their communication/interaction/oral skills. Teachers need to know how to assess and record children's capabilities from their understanding of knowledge, skills attained, social and moral values that have been achieved. Aspects that are assessed are: a) aspects of knowledge; b) aspects of skills attained; and c) aspects of values/moral values.

### **2.17. Brunei culture and its relation to learning and teaching practices**

Preschool in Brunei takes into account holistic development inculcating Islamic beliefs and the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) concept. In Brunei society, older people and teachers are highly respected, and regarded as sources of wisdom. In the Brunei preschool classroom context, the culture of respecting the teachers can be observed from the classroom routines. The children will stand straight together to welcome and greet the teacher whenever he or she comes into the classroom with the Arabic words, "*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabaraktuh*" ("May peace be upon you"), and followed by the Malay sentences "*Selamat pagi Cikgu*" ("Good morning teacher"). The teacher will then respond in Arabic, "*Wa 'alaikumsalam warahmatullahi wabaraktuh*" ("May peace be upon you too") and followed by the Malay words "*Selamat pagi murid-murid! Sila duduk.*" ("Good morning children! Please have a seat"). When it is the end of the day, the children will stand up in unison and say the words together, in Arabic, "*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabaraktuh*" ("May Peace be upon you") and then, "*Terima Kasih, Cikgu! Jumpa lagi Cikgu!*" ("Thank you, teacher! See you tomorrow, teacher!"). The teacher will then respond, in Arabic, "*Walaikumsalam warahmatullahi*

*wabarakatuh*” (“May peace be upon you too”). After that, the children will line up to take the teacher’s hands and kiss it as a means of showing respect before they leave the classroom.

## **2.18. Transformation towards improving services for Brunei preschool education under SPN21**

The Brunei government is investing in enhancing the quality of preschool education and has made that enhancement one of the country’s priorities in *Wawasan* Brunei 2035; to achieve high quality preschool education. In gearing towards that vision, several major changes relating to early childhood education have taken place in Brunei. At the national level, the preschool educational system, under SPN21, is currently undergoing improvements to its preschool curriculum and practice. At the ministerial level, the Ministry of Education, Brunei, has set up the ‘Early Childhood Care and Education Unit’, henceforth the ECCE Unit, in June 2010. The aim of this unit is to support improvements to early childhood education, informed by SPN21. This is an important phase as the establishment of the ECCE Unit acts as a catalyst towards changes in the Brunei preschool education of today.

To ensure the delivery of SPN21 for preschool education, the ECCE Unit has implemented many changes designed to improve and ensure quality in the preschool pedagogical landscape. Examples of such changes include: i) orientation programmes for potential preschool students, which began in November 2011; followed by staggered entry and registration; ii) placements of sixth form student-volunteers as preschool teachers’ assistants in January 2013; iii) transformation of preschool pedagogical landscapes in 2013; iv) proposed Islamic education and moral education with religious activities incorporated at the preschool level for 2013; along with v) the proposed contents of Islamic and moral education for preschool in 2013. The mention of Islamic education is because there is, as yet, no official, formal syllabus for Islamic and moral education for preschoolers or preschool students.

## **2.19. Preschool teacher training**

There are variations in terms of the highest academic background or professional backgrounds of the Bruneian preschool teachers. Table 2.4, (below), shows the qualifications of the preschool teachers employed in Brunei government schools in 2010.

Hence, the existence of the terms ‘trained’ and ‘untrained’ preschool teachers. The term ‘trained teachers’ refers to those who graduated with the early childhood education specialisation, while those from other educational fields are referred to as ‘untrained teachers’. Since the number of untrained teachers is more than the number of trained preschool teachers, the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit has retrained all preschool teachers in Brunei through a series of workshops. In particular, these workshops were designed to help the ‘untrained teachers’ to understand the various pedagogical approaches currently to be found in preschools. Some of the workshops are using the ‘learning through play’ approaches, integration of subjects, the project approach and the mind map approach. Although the MoE is retraining all preschool teachers, this process does not involve an accredited and certified course, as this initiative is designed for use with continuous development programmes.

Today, when the government hires a new graduate to work at the preschool level, it is expected that he or she may have already acquired a university degree. For example, Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood, Master of Teaching in Early Childhood, Master of Education in Early Childhood or a PhD in Early Childhood.

**Table 2.4. Statistics of preschool teachers in Brunei government and private schools**

Qualifications	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
MA in Education	0	7 (2)	7 (2)
M. Ed in Early Childhood Education	0	8 (2)	8 (2)
Masters (Others)	0	6 (1)	6 (1)
B. Ed in Early Childhood Education	3 (1)	29 (7)	32 (8)
BA in Primary Education	10 (2)	46 (11)	56 (13)
<b>Diploma in Primary Education</b>	<b>10 (2)</b>	<b>83 (20)</b>	<b>93 (22)</b>
<b>Certificate in Education</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>71 (17)</b>	<b>71 (17)</b>
Certificate in Early Childhood Education	0	27 (6)	27 (6)
A-Level	0	13 (3)	13 (3)
O-Level	0	75 (18)	75 (18)
Others	2 (0)	35 (8)	37 (9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>25 (6)</b>	<b>400 (94)</b>	<b>425 (100)</b>

Source: Asmah, Nordiana, and Siti (2010)

Teaching is attracting many people in Brunei due to its wide availability, being easy to find on the labour market and offering higher pay than many other jobs in the government and non-government sectors (Mundia, 2012). In Brunei, the most common entry route for preschool teachers is a general initial teacher education programme from their local university; in this case the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Before 2009, the Sultan Hassanal Bolkhiah Institute of Education (SHBIE), UBD was the main provider for teacher training and graduate programmes. Courses ranging from Certificate in Education up to first degree courses were offered to those interested in becoming a teacher via general or specialised courses. In late 2008, SHBIE was upgraded to a graduate school, which then embarked on a new journey of providing masters courses, Master of Teaching degrees and doctoral programmes; closing its doors to any undergraduate programmes. This major shift in focus was a reaction to the needs of SPN21 to raise the standards of the teachers, and to have specialised teachers at the preschool level. Only selected teachers will be eligible to upgrade as a means of raising the status of ECE teachers, but not all of them will be qualified to the same level.

The remaining teachers, who are already in the field of teaching, are undergoing various continuous professional development courses, in order to support them to meet the new requirements of Brunei's preschool education system of today. This upgrading initiative is also a means of ending the practice of hiring unqualified teachers, as well as creating a no-tolerance mindset for incompetence in the classroom. Hence, the Ministry of Education is providing a clear statement that to be a teacher one needs to be well and appropriately qualified.

## **2.20. Analysis of policy change in the Brunei preschool education system**

By 2035, Brunei wishes to be recognised for the accomplishments of its well-educated and highly skilled people, improving the quality of life and for the creation of a dynamic and sustainable economy. This is also on a par globally, as there has been growing attention and interest in the issue of early childhood education by many countries (Aubrey and Durmaz, 2012; Ebbeck and Chan, 2011; Gray, 2012a; Grieshaber, 2010). In order to meet the 2035 national vision, there are eight strategies and an education strategy is one of them. To meet the challenge of realising the Brunei Vision 2035, the Ministry of Education, informed by the work done by National Education Review Committee, has made a big change. The product of the change is the new National Education System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, SPN21. The new education system involves three changes which are focused on: a) education structure, b) curriculum assessment and c) technical education. The system also places greater emphasis on the following issues: a) 'character building', b) no school retention from Year 1 to Year 10/11, c) improvements in students' achievements, d) improvements in national standards benchmarked against international standards, and e) improvements in teaching and learning standards (MoE, 2009). Although Brunei is setting standards in the direction of international discourses, great efforts are also being made to improve the country's culture and traditions by strengthening proficiency in the Malay language and putting emphasis on 'character building', based on the Bruneian ideology of the MIB practice, as explained earlier in this chapter.

Media, such as newspapers, in Brunei have documented a wide range of SPN21 curriculum reforms from the initial stage of drafting until today. One of the articles in the Brunei Times newspaper, is very significant as it highlights the fact that the preschool teachers in Brunei are all being retrained, without taking into consideration

whether or not they are trained or untrained early childhood teachers. The article, “MoE retrains all preschool teachers”, focuses on the nationwide ‘Capacity Development of Pre-school Teachers Programme’, which was launched on March 16, 2011. The programme was the Ministry of Education’s first initiative to retrain all pre-school teachers in the country, following the establishment of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit in June 2010. The programme, which began on March 28, 2011, consisted of six workshops including topics such as: a) holistic development through play, b) literacy and numeracy activities for children, and c) planning outdoor activities effectively. By the end of the programme, all 703 pre-school teachers in the country, 204 in government and 499 in private schools, had been retrained. By 2012, all preschool teachers nationwide had been properly trained. According to the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit, there are currently 3,440 children in government pre-schools and 9,430 pre-school children in private institutions. At the same time, a total of 95 teachers will also be trained to become facilitators, who will help guide other pre-school teachers in the country (Sharleen, 2011).

This current research has been triggered by my own personal interest in, and the newspaper articles published in Brunei about, preschool education. The points highlighted include: a) the curriculum reform issues relevant to teacher training and b) programmes for preschool children and parental involvement. Examples of the articles are “Preschool Education Vital for Children's Future Success” (Thien, 2010), “MoE Seeks Volunteers to Aid Preschool Teachers” (Mun, 2012), “Not All Parents Understand SPN21” (Rashidah and Sally, 2011), “Children Get a Feel of School” (Teoh, 2012); there are many more such publications. The phenomenon of frequently putting Brunei preschools as newspaper headlines only began in 2007; prior to that time there was very little news about Brunei preschools in the papers. Today’s contemporary articles mainly focus on teachers’ knowledge and skills in working with the 21<sup>st</sup> century children, and on the preschool children themselves. This orientation suggests preschool education is high on the policy and media agendas, which represents a significant shift in focus. Local researchers, as well as consultants from overseas, have identified certain aspects of the National Education System that need to be improved. As a result, the government’s response, informed by international discourse and national priorities through the Ministry of Education, is SPN21. This new education system, SPN21, has

motivated me to understand the phenomenon of pedagogical change processes within the Brunei preschool education, both in theory and practice.

### **2.21. Summary**

This chapter has provided a brief overview into the Bruneian context, culture and school system as background information for this study. Brunei's preschool education system is at the stage of evolving and developing its early childhood services. Currently, the government schools only provide preschool education to children who are five years old; there is no governmental provision or support for play centres or day-care centres that cater for children who are less than the compulsory school age. Private schools in Brunei, on the other hand, cater to children from three years old. SPN21, as Brunei's National Education System, has brought along three major reforms: a) education structure, b) curriculum and assessment, and c) technical and vocational education and training.

In Brunei, both government and private preschools are available for children aged five to six. These preschools are supervised by the Ministry of Education, teach the national curriculum of SPN21, which was revised in 2009. These combined measures are intended to prepare children effectively for primary education, but also to address inequality, so that all children at the preschool level will have access to the same resources.

Overall, the country has made notable strides in preschool education. In 1997, the government made the bold decision to turn preschool teaching into a graduate profession. To achieve this, an intensive retraining programme was launched, sending all existing preschool teachers on a professional development course. At the same time, all new preschool hires had to have graduate degrees. It is helpful to know this background information, in order to understand the phenomenon of change in teaching and learning in the area of Brunei ECE, along with other global contexts that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1. Introduction

The focus of this research is to understand the phenomena of pedagogical change processes as they happen in the Brunei preschool education system. The literature review in this section is divided into two parts. The first part looks at the international literature relating to educational reform drivers, followed by discussion of highlights on key themes such as: a) international trends of investment in early childhood, b) teacher competencies, c) pedagogical approaches in early childhood today, d) the benefits of the educational reforms in early childhood, and e) the challenges in the transition from educational policy to practice. This part will also cover: i) teachers as agents of change, ii) teachers' beliefs and iii) students' responses towards change in adjusting to the new curriculum needs. The second part of the literature review will look into the theories of change by: i) presenting the definition of educational change, ii) the process of, and models for, implementing change, iii) responses to change, iv) factors that contribute as roadblocks to, or support the implementation of, change, v) leadership, vi) ways to sustain changes, and finally vii) teachers' training and professional development.

### 3.2. International practice of curriculum reforms

Mueller (2012) mentioned that the concept of 'curriculum' is complicated to define, as it is related to the context of what happens in schools. This point then leads to different ways to approach the definition of curriculum, which is typically viewed as the "formal products and documents" that guide classroom practice (Mueller, 2012, p. 54). File (2012, p. 14) argues that the definition of curriculum has been acknowledged and characterised by researchers as "a package of content and methods, as authored by an entity". She further claimed that curriculum is regarded by qualitative researchers as "lived experiences in the teaching/learning process".

Aubrey and Durmaz (2012) mention that internationally, high-quality early childhood education is related to potential academic and economic consequences. This factor has brought in major significant shifts in policy and plans dedicated to refining and improving the quality of education, and these initiatives are on the rise internationally. With the evolving curriculum in the global context of early childhood education, let us focus on some key international curriculum reforms from the European countries such

as Sweden, Norway, England, and Poland, which started with the foundations of the child-centred approach. These European countries are moving towards more direct intentional teaching with their education reforms. Australia is also included to highlight education reform issues on its national Early Years Learning Framework. We then look at the Asian countries like South Korea, Hong Kong, and Qatar; the South East Asian countries of Singapore, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Philippines, Myanmar, and Lao PDR are also presented. The reasoning for including this broad spectrum of South East Asian nations is because Brunei is located in Asia, specifically in the South East Asian region, and these countries share a similarity with Brunei starting from traditional teacher-directed approaches and moving towards child-centred approaches with their education reforms. Qatar is also chosen in this literature review to present how an Islamic country is undergoing educational reforms, as Brunei is also an Islamic country. This trace of international curriculum reforms will enable us to understand the changes that are happening in other parts of the world, before digging deeper into Brunei's education changes. The following paragraphs of this section will trace how different countries have responded to different international and national policy drivers.

Levin (1998) and Althani and Romanowski (2013) looked at different educational policies of different countries and stated that although they may look similar, when looked at more closely there are differences according to context. What is happening in education globally is not explained as mutual learning, as some parts of policies and practices are removed from a country's traditional approach, and are implemented somewhere else without accounting for the context. While countries look to borrow each other's ideas, they learn less from each other's experiences. Tan (2016) describes the process of translation of education reforms into a different setting from its locality, as going through theory-ladenness. Tan (2016) explained theory-ladenness as "everything one observes or perceives is influenced by, and interpreted through, one's prior theory or ideology that comprises one's beliefs, values, assumptions, expectations, etc." (p. 195). This perspective is emphasised further by Whitty (2016, p. 52) who suggests understanding context is key to the realisation of educational reform objectives. Whitty presented a number of policy-borrowing cases in countries like England, the USA, and Canada, highlighting the recognition to learn lessons from overseas and the implications of understanding their settings. Ball (1998), refers to this policy-borrowing as a practice of 'bricolage' meaning "borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas

from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches...flailing around for anything...that looks as though it might work” (p. 126). Furthermore, Whitty and Wisby (2016) argued that their research on policy-borrowing researchers in the education field can support the challenges in education reform by sharing knowledge that is not limited to ‘what works’; they also addressed the issue of why such reform is unsustainable and the reasons behind that conclusion. This is similar to the Brunei preschool curriculum, which took account of, and was informed by, foundations of Western preschool models as mentioned earlier in Section 2.9.

There are many resources of comparative data to draw on from a number of international organizations, which have already undertaken research and analysis of early childhood services. The International Bureau of Education, (UNESCO, 2013) has compiled a list of resources in relation to early childhood education and care. International comparative studies, such as the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2012), provide the Starting Well Index, which is benchmarking early childhood education internationally. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also contribute data to make it possible to provide comparisons of the quality of educational outcomes across systems of education. Barber and Mourshed (2007) addressed the issue of how the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top, and linked their findings from quantitative and qualitative studies to provide the similarity of the characteristics shared by those schools. The report provides a detailed picture of how countries that are top-ranking early childhood providers are practicing and able to achieve their success. The researchers also reported that the experiences of these top-performing school systems indicate there are three significant factors that help to improve student outcomes: 1) hiring the correct people to become teachers, 2) developing those teachers into effective instructors, and 3) ensuring that the system can provide quality learning to the children. International early childhood education policy reforms are therefore influenced by; i) a country’s membership in international organisations and that country subscribing to international agreements, ii) a country’s developmental national vision, iii) a country’s embracing of diversity agendas, iv) the governments’ views on the significance of early childhood education, v) the country’s technological advancements and vi) the country’s aspiration(s) to prepare their younger generations for the future (Nasser, 2017; Wood and Hedges, 2016; Tan, 2016; Whitty

and Wisby, 2016; Kirk, 2015; Rodd, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012; Georgeson, Payler and Campbell-Barr, 2013; Pearson and Rao, 2006; Levin, 1998). However, globalisation can also bring threats to countries that do not take into account their own local context of culture and tradition, when adopting or importing curricula from other countries. For example, many of the Gulf States prefer to import educational systems, curricula and even providers (Kirk, 2015, p. 84). Therefore, the models of educational curricula in the Gulf States are examples of ‘replication without adaptation’, a paradigm which does not therefore provide full support to the curriculum or the teaching and learning processes.

Whilst trying to achieve certain goals, a country’s association with, or membership of, international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Development (APEC), can also act as a catalyst for further developments in the field of early childhood. The early childhood developments stem from the agreed commitments to achieve certain goals which are then coordinated from policy within the countries’ national systems and by international education collaboration, via the achievement of quality standards like PISA (Boyles and Charles, 2016; Menter and Hulme, 2013; Rizvi, 2004 and 2007). All the above sources’ influences can result in heightened attention towards improving a nation’s early childhood education services. Organisations such as the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), monitor and help developing countries to build and support their early childhood services. It is worth noting that although countries are investing in early childhood, it does not necessarily mean that quality is automatically there as a result of further developmental progress. There may also be countries that do not have the economic stability or strength to invest much in the early childhood services they provide, but are still trying to provide quality by having a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in their region. The NGO will reach out to educate the public and have some sort of established framework, for example in Myanmar, upon which to build their early childhood education services (Miyahara, 2013). Sweden, Norway and England are examples of countries that are still ranked among the world’s best performing education providers (UNESCO, 2012). These countries have foundations to

their early childhood education services and have varieties from child care provisions to preschool, along with proper quality teachers' standards, monitoring and evaluating systems. The critique here is not to assume that countries with high economic income will necessarily bring quality assurance to the field of early childhood. There are many factors to be taken into consideration, such as: a) the monitoring of progress, b) assessing quality standards, c) the types of services provided, d) the qualifications of the staff, e) the governmental policies that help or hinder progress for the teachers, and f) the support given to ensure smooth implementation of change in ECE settings. One may not assume that all early childhood services are similar in another country, as the culture and tradition of one's country normally differentiate that nation's uniqueness.

South East Asian countries are also not left behind in the global education reform agenda that is ongoing. Those countries have revised their national curricula frameworks to ensure children are given high quality education. For example, Lao PDR in 2012 revised their national curriculum to the Preschool Education Curriculum of Lao PDR 2012; in 2013 Singapore implemented the Nurturing Early Learners Curriculum; in 2014 Indonesia adopted the Early Childhood Education Curriculum; Timor-Leste acted in 2014 with the Pre-Eskola Kurikula; the Philippines in 2015 adopted the Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (four years old and below) and the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide, and Brunei implemented the SPN21 programme in 2009.

A lot of countries are going on this journey of change by improving and investing in preschool education, but they are not all doing it in exactly the same way. Sweden and England have been investing heavily in preschool education for some time and as a result have high quality care and education. These countries are changing what they were doing in previous decades. While countries like Sweden and England have a foundation for educators' standards, countries like Brunei and Myanmar are still at the stage of creating their own teacher standards to ensure quality in the early childhood field. Such initiatives show that countries are not just sitting happily with the services they have but are continuing to develop better processes and outcomes. This development concept forms the basis of a pledge taken by countries internationally towards developing and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 2015; where one of the goals is to achieve universal primary education (UNESCO, 2013).

The website document on Sweden's education, ("Education: Lessons for Life," 2012) showed that although Sweden is ranked top of 25 OECD countries for its education practices, according to PISA, it is also reforming the national curriculum. The introduction of the Swedish Education Act (2011), aims to increase the importance of teaching as a career and, as a consequence, improve students' results. There are major changes that can be comprehended from the mentioned document, such as the new curricula for schools, compulsory for all children. At the preschool level, the curriculum includes precise objectives for children's language and communication development, including science and technology. This change brought about a remarkable reform in Sweden's educational practice, from being a traditionally informal, flexible, play-based approach to acknowledging the importance of direct intentional teaching in the subject areas in order to foster school readiness, with defined learning outcomes.

Qatar is a small, albeit rich, country with its revenues coming largely from oil and gas. Prior to 2000, Qatar acknowledged the significance of early childhood education services; however, investments made in that field were fairly poor. In 2007 Qatar shifted its focus to increased financial investment towards raising the status and improvement of education in Qatar. The country has initiated a transformation within its schools, in conjunction with its Ministry of Education, from a low quality, relatively neglected model, into a world-class education system known as 'Education for a New Era' (EFNE). This initiative was also partly due to Qatar's response in improving its education system after the poor reviews standardised by international league tables, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and PISA. These reviews triggered Qatar's proactive reaction to major financial investments towards its national education system (Ellili-Cherif, 2013; Romanowski, Ellili-Cherif, Al Ammari, and Atiyyah, 2013; Althani and Romanowski, 2013). Qatar's educational reform, EFNE, is still evolving today; the Supreme Educational Council (SEC) has been established to ensure successful implementation of the EFNE initiative. The SEC has brought many changes into Qatar's education levels, as the council is responsible for ensuring teachers and schools are performing at or near international high standards (Nasser, 2017; Palmer et al., 2016; Romanowski et al., 2013). According to Althani and Romanowski (2013), by focusing on the preschool level, EFNE has introduced reforms that shift the traditional teacher-directed approach to a more child-centred learning/teaching model. The preschool component of the system has recorded a

significant enrolment increase, with 50% of children in school since the implementation of EFNE, compared to the low enrolment rate before its implementation. The Early Years Education Good Practice Guide publications complement EFNE, by playing a significant role in influencing early childhood education in Qatar.

### **3.3. Cultural tensions**

A study done by Althani and Romanowski (2013) looked into Qatar's preschool practice to find out the level of Western influence in the teaching philosophy and practice. Data was obtained by making comparisons and contrasts between three preschool settings in England and three preschool settings in Qatar. Their findings revealed that in Qatar, there are more than 30% of Qatar teachers who were not certified to teach, with 31% of the teachers having no teaching qualifications and 35% of them teaching in independent schools. Their research revealed that the teachers still practiced a teacher-directed approach, with various ways to discipline and get the students attention to lead a whole class activity, although the EFNE has adopted a Western approach of child centred pedagogy. This teaching style contradicts the Early Childhood Education Good Practices Guide of the SEC, whereby teachers are to be facilitators of learning and not direct instructors of learning, as traditional in Qatar. This contradiction relates back to Qatar's culture, which emphasises teachers' authority, teachers' leadership and the requirement for children's obedience as good traditional practice. This finding of cultural tension is also similar to the Bruneian context; studies from Hanapi (2006) and Asmah (2001) have shown that the similarity may be due to the same Islamic beliefs, as practiced in both countries, relating to students' manners of respecting their teacher.

In addition, when it comes to the classroom settings, Qatar is not much different to the English settings, with the set-up of learning corners. The study by Althani and Romanowski (2013) further illustrated that the learning corners in Qatar are either underutilised or not used at all, although there exists the structure, organisation and opportunities to implement a child-centred learning approach. In terms of the new teaching approaches, due to their lack of qualifications to teach, the teachers themselves were found to be struggling, as the textbooks to be used are the product of Western thinking, without the detailed instruction of how to implement the suggested child-centred approach. The teachers also went back to traditional teaching methods of

teaching directly from the text, with the required memorisation of information. This is in contrast with the three English settings that promote child-centred learning and then move on to emphasise literacy and numeracy. Hence, studies by Nasser (2017) and Althani and Romanowski (2013) exemplified the role of neoliberalism and the dangers of adopting Western approaches without further adaptation to, and acknowledgement of, cultural sensitivity. The researchers' findings have also exemplified the existing cultural tensions in terms of the difference of teachers' beliefs and classroom practice with the children. The authors recommended the development of a Qatari model of education that adapts Western practices to the Qatari context. Althani and Romanowski (2013) further presented an argument that cultural influence should not be blamed or regarded as an obstacle to implement the education reform of EFNE; rather the education reforms should be modified to be compatible with the Qatari religion, culture and beliefs. Finally, it was suggested that the local teachers should be actively involved in these changes in order to achieve successful implementation of EFNE. The findings of Althani and Romanowski (2013) are reiterated by Romanowski et al. (2013), concluding that the sudden and ongoing changes, introduced to successfully implement EFNE, have provided unrealistic requirements imposed on schools and are therefore seen as problematic. Romanowski et al. (2013) and Kirk (2015) argued that the lack of qualified local teachers can act as roadblocks to the development of EFNE.

Several studies have been carried out on curriculum reforms in different countries. One such example is a study from Hong Kong (Li, Wang, and Wong, 2011), which examined Shenzhen kindergarten teachers' beliefs and teaching practices; noting how their pedagogical practice is supporting the changes in the curriculum goals. The main findings of the study were the significant gap between teachers' reported beliefs and their actual practices. Some of the Shenzhen teachers implemented traditional teaching methods such as whole-class teaching, teacher-centred and theme-based direct instruction. The rest of the teachers implemented the Western approach to teaching; for example, setting up of the learning corners and valuing children's preferences. This scenario contradicts some of the teachers' reported beliefs and practices in favouring the child-initiated, child-centred approach, combined in a balanced teacher-directed and child-initiated model. The gap that existed between beliefs and practice is within the context of Chinese culture, whereby obedience, discipline, self-control, hard work, and academic achievements are highly appreciated and valued. Such values of expected

academic achievements in preschool are not foreign to the Brunei context, where the Bruneian parents expect their children to be able to count, write and read at preschool (Asmah, 2007; Hanapi, 2006). The other main finding of the study by Li et al. (2011) revealed the inconsistencies concerning classroom pedagogical practice and the curriculum reform goals. Play was rarely observed in the classroom teaching and learning, and Chinese early literacy skills, such as rote learning, copying exercises, and testing were all regularly practised.

Poland is an example of a country that used to have low-quality education but which has now gone through a major transformation of the education system. Poland is today regarded as “an eastern European educational powerhouse” and is ranked one of the top 10 global countries in science and reading, and 13<sup>th</sup> in mathematics on the PISA (Handke, 2015, p. 34). Poland has changed its educational system by customising it to include Polish social and cultural contexts. Handke (2015) highlighted that it would be difficult for a country to reproduce a reform similar to Poland’s; perhaps some parts can be adapted to one’s country but not the complete entity. Handke (2015, p. 37) further commented that the lesson learnt from Poland’s education reform is that the foundations of the education system are interrelated with each other and that educational changes do take time to provide the looked-for outcomes.

For Australia, their reform agenda is informed by *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). This document is the first Australian national framework, introduced in 2010, for the guidance of the early childhood curriculum and its associated pedagogy, with the intent of identifying possibilities for thinking about and working with the EYLF. The change agenda reflects thinking by the OECD and UNICEF, and is based on the idea of starting strong and investing in the individual’s early years (Irvine and Farrell, 2013). The EYLF is part of an important reform, as it is a main factor in the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) change agenda for the nation’s early childhood education. EYLF is also a central part of the Australian Government’s National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. According to the Department of Education (2013), the EYLF framework covers children’s learning outcomes from zero to five years old, prepares children towards school transition, and recognises the use of

play-based learning. Tayler (2011) added that the EYLF framework recognises the significance of early literacy and numeracy, as well as social and emotional development for children's learning.

In England, curriculum frameworks have changed four times between 1996 and 2012 (Fisher and Wood, 2012). Being one of the top four countries on the Starting Well Index (2012, p. 14), several transformations were introduced in terms of policy which, in 2008, saw the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum (DfE, 2012), revised in September 2012. The EYFS is considered as a 'ground-breaking' curriculum, which includes provision for children from birth to five, those in pre-school and those children in primary school settings. The EYFS offers the early years' providers the necessary standards to ensure children are given opportunities to learn and develop in a safe and healthy environment. All children in England who go to nurseries, pre-schools and reception classes follow the EYFS curriculum. The objective of the EYFS is to ensure all children are given opportunities for learning through child-initiated play and teacher-initiated activities. Throughout the journey of the new process of change in the EYFS, there have been repeated concerns about the lack of consistency between the EYFS and Key Stage 1, resulting in a loss of trust in policies to enable sustained changes in practice. Lightfoot and Frost (2015) argued that although the new EYFS framework is embedded in play, as the ideology of child-centred practice and curriculum framework, the early years' educators are moving towards particular learning goals and outcomes. This emphasis on learning goals is to ensure the children are prepared and equipped for Year One. Fisher and Wood (2012) stated that policy-compliant training, which has oriented towards changing practices without altering knowledge and beliefs, characterises a restricted model of professional development and change.

Roberts-Holmes (2012) carried out a government-funded study on the experiences of twelve nursery and primary head teachers on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), after its initial year of introduction in 2010. This study was located within the interpretivist paradigm which focused on three open-ended research policy driven questions: 1) "How does the EYFS influence day-to-day practice with children and families?" 2) "How, if at all, has the EYFS supported improvements in the care and education offered by practitioners?" and 3) "What, if any, obstacles and difficulties do

you face in the effective use of EYFS?” His main findings were that i) head teachers support the child-led and play-based EYFS principles, and ii) the EYFS demands well-educated professional staff. The evidence from the study suggests that head teachers have embraced the EYFS, viewing it as supporting a unique early childhood pedagogy (Roberts-Holmes, 2012).

According to Tan (2017), Singapore preschools are divided into two categories for children under seven years old: i) kindergartens, and ii) childcare centres. Towards the end of 2012, Singapore revised its Kindergarten Curriculum Framework (KCF) to ‘Nurturing Early Learners - A Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore,’ developed by the country’s Ministry of Education (MOE). The new framework includes guidance for Singapore’s pre-school and primary school teachers and early childhood experts, as well as international best practices relating to curriculum frameworks. The framework emphasises the need to prepare children for lifelong learning by developing preschool children’s confidence and social skills (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2013). The learning outcomes are clear and provide guidance not only to parents and educators but to anyone who is interested to learn about the initiative. Tan (2017) and Nyland and Ng (2016, p. 474) found that in Singapore teachers recognised they are struggling with learning through play as required by their training, while Australian teachers do not recognise it as a challenge to their teaching practices and beliefs. Furthermore, Tan (2017), Nyland and Ng (2016) and Ho, Ang, Loh and Ng (1998) acknowledged the presence of tension caused by the Singapore parents not being supportive towards the government’s education reform. The parents’ concerns were viewed as powerful, as they demanded that the schooling of their children be academically oriented, making them ready for success in a highly competitive academic environment. Tan (2017) mentioned that Singapore is also an example of a country that looks towards the international practice of policy-borrowing and adapting. Without directly adopting the ‘learning-through-play’ approach, Singapore has managed to adapt the learning-through-play concept via structured planning by the teachers, to include fun learning activities from the Western style of unstructured and child-initiated play.

The changes towards improving preschool education, moves designed to provide higher quality education, also lead to the issue of assessing the quality of provision and outcomes against a set of standards. Teachers’ standards are being formulated and/or

introduced in many countries. For example, in Singapore the MOE introduced the national accreditation and assessment framework for preschool services, known as The Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK), as a means of measuring quality (Ang, 2012). In Sweden, professional certification is needed for school and preschool/kindergarten teachers who are on permanent contracts. This change led to the introduction of teacher certification on 1<sup>st</sup>. December 2013. This decision also reflects the focus of Sweden's education policy for upgrading the teaching profession, supporting professional development and raising educational quality ("Education: Lessons for Life," 2012). Raising the status of the teaching profession has also been seen in Qatar, where the National Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders have brought in and made clear the benchmarks of skills and dispositions that are expected of the teachers in the schools (Palmer et al., 2016).

The Hong Kong government is providing important foundations for children's holistic development and lifelong learning, goals which have been formally recognised in the area of preschool education. Although the government acknowledges the importance of preschool education, financial support this education sector remains low. The physical structure of the preschool classroom has remained formal but the teachers are increasingly focused on children's development of concepts and hands-on learning (Pearson and Rao, 2006).

Moon (2010) reported an increased enrolment rate in Korean kindergartens, helped with the aid of legislation and customised financial support alongside a diversified model of full-day kindergartens. Meanwhile, Ahn (2015) reported her findings on the South Korean ECE educational reforms introduced to the curriculum, which have rejected Korea's traditional values and embraced a Westernised child-centred approach, in order to incorporate changes to educational beliefs. Some of the changes involved are: a) decentralisation, b) the child-centred approach and c) fostering and promoting the children's sense of self by encouraging children to explore their learning and express themselves. Ahn brought in a viewpoint that the Korean ECE is actively utilising Western educational ideologies; mentioning in 2015 that the Korean case is faced with tensions relating to the curriculum reforms stemming from cultural conflict. Ahn (2015) showed that educational reforms still fail, although there is fusion between international and local contexts; in fact local teachers actively adopted the changes. Furthermore,

Ahn suggested those concerned should study the particulars of the dynamic educational context, and its dimensions, in order to understand the education reforms further.

All these examples of international education changes that have been designed to provide high-quality education and service for ECEC, have shown that global economic and social impact greatly influenced the reforms. We can learn from these international ECEC reform agendas there is evidence the countries mentioned earlier are moving towards upgrading their educational systems. There are indications of Western policy borrowing being incorporated into Asian or Middle Eastern contexts, in order to move their traditional didactic, teacher-centred teaching to a more child-centred approach, as well as using play as the medium of learning. On the other hand, these changes also provide evidence that Western countries, which have adopted a child-centred approach towards teaching and learning, are now looking into the Asian education context. Singapore is being investigated in order to allow Western educators to learn from the city-state's 'best practice' on how to provide better teaching and learning approaches to enhance children's literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore, no matter in which direction the changes are going, to or from Western culture, Eastern culture or Asian culture, it is evident that none of these countries is sitting still. They are providing us with the understanding that educational reform is a global issue; investments and attention have been focused on ECEC.

The international discourse(s) on national education changes in ECEC, provided as examples above, have shown that no single education system or model, as exemplified in this review, is in a static position with their national education systems; we can conclude there is a continuous process of providing improvements to their ECEC agendas. Therefore, it is safe to say that the ECEC national education systems from around the world are still 'works in progress'. There are constant changes towards the process of teaching and learning; hence ECEC national education systems are constantly evolving, making content and structure changes present and unavoidable. Alongside these changes there is also unavoidable constant pressure to adapt existing education systems, as a result of increased attention from the international assessment benchmarks, like PISA (OECD, 2016); similar attention is also coming from OECD reports, politicians, policymakers and the media, amongst other sources (Boyle and Charles, 2016; Menter and Hulme, 2013; Rizvi, 2007). In addition, we can also learn

from these countries, exemplified earlier, to understand what happens when they have been adopting a culture that is different from their traditional values and ways of practice. We can then look closer at these themes by examining how these countries are either embracing, or in fusion with, the change processes; or are in tension with what the changes bring. Furthermore, the countries such as Qatar, Singapore, Australia, Sweden and South Korea have been presented as examples of nations that are making significant changes to their ECEC national education systems. These countries share the similarity of introducing educational reforms through curriculum documents that are implemented at country or state levels. Although the socio-cultural contexts and histories of the countries are different to one another, their curriculum documents share some similarities, either in moving towards a child-centred approach and/or moving towards improving literacy and numeracy standards, as a means of improving school readiness.

The similarity that all these examples of international practices of curriculum reforms show is the development of a curriculum model. The curriculum model shares the reflection of varied beliefs and values that “forms of knowledge or areas of learning are educationally worthwhile for children’s immediate and future needs and the wider needs of the society” (Wood, 2013, p. 69). Another similarity, originating from the international practices, is using the national curriculum frameworks as the main drivers for implementing changes into the country’s education system (Nyland and Ng, 2016), even though these changes may differ in their theoretical perspectives of child-rearing practice and beliefs in teaching (Tayler, 2011).

Wood and Hedges (2016) argue that the curriculum related publications can be seen as policy documents that do not always provide “clarity and coherent guidance about developmental goals” (p. 401). Furthermore, the approach to children’s learning varies in different frameworks; a variety that further adds to the complexity of educational reforms. The international perspectives of early childhood education reforms have also added to our knowledge, helping to build an understanding of diversity and the way each country responds culturally to educational change (Handke, 2015). This perspective brings us back to Fullan (2007) who stated that “reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of classrooms, school districts, universities and so on” (p. 7). This evidence signals that change processes in

ECEC are a significant focus for research. Therefore, the main objective of my study is to explore the Bruneian preschool education context, in order to understand how it is coping with the processes of change in the teaching and learning practice from the perspectives of the teachers, children and senior officers.

The developments outlined in this section of the literature review indicate that there are positive benefits that policy attention to, and investment in, preschools brings. On the other hand, there are certain challenges in the context of practice that need to be addressed; a matter which will be explored in the following section.

### **3.4. Theories of early childhood pedagogy**

ECE developments in countries around the world are currently focused on advancing their ECE services. Economic developments for a country's stability have also been used to drive forces of change into national curriculum statements, based on economic justifications for investing in and improving the types of ECE service and resources provided. These trends have impacted on the roles of the teachers, changing those roles from being lesson directors to facilitators of learning. Such changes also reflect the new theories of early childhood pedagogy. ECE development has resulted in the need for high quality ECEC services and teachers; a need which creates demands for professional development and better learning outcomes from the reformed curriculum structures. Tan (2017) highlighted that international education reforms have moved towards child-centred approaches of teaching and developmentally appropriate practice; mainly by using learning through play as the medium of delivery for teaching and learning. Thus, we have the concept of learning through play that is reflected in many curriculum statements, though with different emphases and interpretations informed by different frameworks.

In South East Asian countries, the early childhood education curricula are moving away from didactic teacher-led methods to a holistic, child-centred and developmentally appropriate framework. Nyland and Ng (2016, p. 473) mentioned theories of play as 'vehicles for learning', have been long-established in the ECE field. However, this is a concept that cannot be easily adopted into one's culture of practice, due the different child rearing beliefs that exist within the context of the adopting nations. Nyland and Ng (2016, p. 474) found that in Singapore teachers recognised they are struggling with

learning through play, as required by their training, while Australian teachers do not recognise it as a challenge to their teaching practice and beliefs, due to their Western style culture and Western heritage. Thus, although similar pedagogical approaches may be recommended in different frameworks, there is no guarantee that they will be readily adopted; regardless of their underpinning in research and policy guidance. As the next section shows, teachers' knowledge, theories and beliefs play a significant role in the policy-practice space.

### **3.5. Teachers' knowledge, theories and beliefs**

New policies and research have brought new challenges as to what constitutes the quality and quantity of professional knowledge required for preschool teachers. In the following section teachers' knowledge, theories and beliefs in their pedagogical practice, in relation to the change processes currently taking place in preschool education, will be explored.

Fullan (2007, p. 129) stated that "educational change depends on what teachers do and think". The beliefs that the teachers have, regarding their teaching and individual identities, impact on how those teachers deliver their lessons in practice (Cobanoglu and Capa-Aydin, 2015). Colwell et al. (2015, p. 103) mentioned that the influence of social context affects education as a whole and is an important factor, enabling teachers to be reflective in their teaching. Social structures and agency in education can influence national policy frameworks, as well as daily teaching and learning practice. When are using their agency, teachers can have an impact on the changes that are being implemented. In terms of educational change, understanding the involved social structures and agency will help us to understand why people are acting the way they are in their practice. Colwell et al. (2015, p. 103) identified four characteristics of the social context that influence education practice: 1) ideology; 2) culture; 3) opportunity; and 4) accountability.

Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2011) and File (2012) state that teachers are imbued with their own beliefs, values and perspectives when they come into a school. They bring their individualised views about the curriculum, teaching practice and other processes, and differ in their personal teaching styles. This professional baggage leads to the understanding that teachers have their own professional identities that are unique to the

individual (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015). With educational policy change, the teacher's identity also changes, thereby impacting on the teacher's attitudes when deciding the degree to which he or she will follow the educational setting; each teacher's professional identity goes through the process of structuring and restructuring (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015, p. 403). The authors suggested that the dynamic process teachers go through with their professional identity creates problems and tensions, which also contribute to their beliefs in practice. Teacher agency is also part of the process of structuring and restructuring, as is the teachers' capability to reflect and regulate their thinking to facilitate their understanding of their own professional identity. Lightfoot and Frost (2015) further added that the reflecting teachers do, in their everyday classroom decisions and practice, is regarded as teachers' agency and is therefore an important factor in shaping teachers' professional identities.

When teachers are able to identify what works well in their classroom context, and what does not work well, this is a sign of teacher agency (Ketelaar, Koopman, Den Brok, Beijaard and Boshuizen (2014, p. 330). Vongalis-Macrow (2007, p. 426) suggests that when teachers' teaching and learning practice delivers the reorganising processes required, to enable new educational organisations to develop and strengthen over time, this is considered as change in teachers' agency. Furthermore, "obligations, authority and autonomy" are the main characteristics of agency (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007, p. 428). By viewing and unpacking the diverse range of teachers' agency components, we can explore the tri-agency characteristics of i) obligation, ii) authority and iii) autonomy, in order to understand how teachers respond to structural changes, without responding and transforming solely to structural reforms (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007, p. 428).

Fisher and Wood (2012) focused on finding strategies that early childhood teachers use to encourage critical reflection, discussion and change practices in their Adult-Child Interaction Project. Fisher and Wood reported on the progress of the initial stage of their project that assesses the effectiveness of adult-child interactions. The project combined theoretical and research concepts with policy developments, to illuminate changes in teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices (Fisher and Wood, 2012). The study adopts an interpretivist action research methodology with the focus of enquiry on the participants' actions, intentions and meanings. The strength of the methodology shows the effect and the advantage of the action research components. The teachers were able

to think more critically about their actions by recognising the effects of change on their teaching philosophies. The methodology that was adopted impacted on practitioners' thinking, as it was derived from the use of video recordings, writing logs, observation and analysis, as well as engagement with research and practice. The project further reveals educational change processes are not adequate to maintain the changes in practice. Fisher and Wood (2012) stated that the practices of professional development and changing theories, beliefs and practices are complicated and take time, commitment and proficiency. This study illustrates that the potential benefits of changing theories, beliefs and practices incorporate successful changes that can be maintained by collaborative practices.

Ebbeck and Chan (2011) pointed out that changing practice requires teachers to be able to adapt from a teacher-centred to a more child-centred approach, requiring them to collaborate with other teachers. The informal teaching approach to professional development does not always sit well with formal teaching practices that are often found in South-East Asian countries' school-rooms. This possible lack of ease is because, traditionally in the Asian context, teachers are highly valued and respected as knowledgeable people; therefore there exists a tradition of teacher-directed teaching strategies. The purpose of this current study is to explore some of these concepts and trends in the context of policy and practice changes in the Brunei preschool education system; in part to add to the existing literature that illuminates change processes in ECE, incorporating both global and local perspectives.

Samuelsson and Sheridan (2010) highlight that, in order to educate and prepare preschool teachers to be effective in their classrooms, it will require professional education in parallel with the new theories of preschool children's learning and development. Alterations in the ECE organisation will also be required. If the teacher is able to adopt and adapt new approaches then it is considered as an advantage to the teachers who are teaching development and skills. This view is echoed by Mundia (2012) who suggested the high entry qualification to teaching may not guarantee teacher effectiveness, and that knowledge of the subject matter is crucial to facilitate and contribute towards change processes. Similarly, Goldhaber (2002) suggests that good teaching is significant in improving children's achievements. The differences in teachers' qualifications, experience in teaching, differences in subject knowledge and

pedagogical knowledge have little impact on contributing towards being a good teacher. In his review, he mentioned variables like enthusiasm, humour, connection with the children, skills in delivering the teaching and learning process and good rapport with parents are also characteristics of good teaching. However, Goldhaber's findings cannot be accepted unequivocally, as there is little evidence on the issue of certification. Therefore, we are faced with the issue of maintaining preschool quality to help facilitate children's learning, by communicating the established school topics via child-centred pedagogy, as the beginning of lifelong learning (Samuelsson and Sheridan, 2010). This point is also emphasised by Wood (2013) and Wood and Hedges (2016), where practitioners need in-depth understanding of young children's learning, and are equipped with various teaching approaches to deliver a curriculum that is: a) responsive to children's interests and b) which anticipates future developments. The researchers recommended the desirability of a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, as well as highlighting the complexity of pedagogy in ECE settings.

For the ECE field, there may be several benefits from identifying the professionals in preschool, as specifically trained early childhood teachers, rather than as general teachers (Samuelsson and Sheridan, 2010). This point is raised because early childhood teachers are trained to track the progress of a child's development and learning, and are able to use a range of appropriate pedagogical approaches for preschool children. If there are shifts required in pedagogical approaches and/or curriculum and assessment practices, these teachers may adapt well and more quickly, when compared to the general teachers. It is arguable the latter group will then need more time and guidance to be able to implement the curriculum goals and outcomes. This qualification issue raises the question of whether teachers are active or passive agents of change in educational reform processes.

### **3.6. Teachers as agents of change**

The global economy has indirectly influenced international efforts in curriculum reforms and has impacted on teachers' ways of teaching and learning, as discussed in the section above. Reform processes are informed by an economic discourse of investment in ECE, as a benefit to children and to society. International policy discourse has influenced education systems globally; thereby influencing teachers' knowledge, theories and beliefs. This fluid situation contributes to the current dynamic educational

changes in schools globally, as teachers are the change drivers. Teachers are the people who have to implement changes in order to respond to the changes made by policy makers. Vongalis-Macrow (2007, p. 326) has said that the impact of policy has treated the teachers “like a quality product, updated, shaped and remodelled to fit the demands of delivering education”. By viewing teachers in such a way, the teachers are seen to be “devalued”, “deskilled” and “disempowered” as Giroux (2010, p. 36) mentioned. Instead, Giroux (2010, p. 38) argued that we need to view teachers as intellectuals, who must be accountable to probe questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the aspirations are for which they are striving. He also argued that by viewing teachers as intellectuals, they should become transformative intellectuals, which means “being able to develop a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility, so teachers can recognize that they can make changes” by being reflective. By viewing teachers as intellectuals, teachers gain their power to be “transformative intellectuals” and in control of their own classrooms (Giroux, 2010, p. 36). Therefore, this section highlights teachers as agents of change in order for us to understand further the change processes that are taking place in teaching and learning.

The intentions to improve education systems are positive, as they represent aims towards improving outcomes for children. Therefore, being a teacher comes with the need to be adaptive towards any change requirements within their professional practice. Even if there are no curricular changes, the teachers are still responding to the changes in their classroom culture, especially when it is a new term with new groups of children to teach. They will be adjusting their teaching and learning processes to suit the learning needs of the children. Undeniably, “teachers are in the position of the subject and the agent of change” (Sikes, 1992, p. 36). Behind the macro factors regarding reasons for change, there is often a policy assumption, which may be evident from performance data, that all is not well; an assumption that raises concerns about why children are not receiving the best education. The reasons for change may also reflect the assumption or evidence from reports that teachers may be lacking adequate knowledge, skills, and competencies; or may hold inappropriate personal beliefs and ideologies (Nasser, 2017; Tan, 2016; Fullan, 2007). Change is then brought in to ‘fix’ the problem and propose solutions. Furthermore, “teachers are positioned as drivers and agents of compliance within the change process” (Jones and Charteris, 2017, p. 496). The danger of this compliance with change processes is that ‘one size does not fit all’ for the successful

implementation of change, as that change happens uniquely in its own context. In addition, the time needed to introduce and embed changes is often under-estimated by policy makers.

According to Kambouri (2015), when teachers are engaging in action research, they can become agents of transformation. They can develop reflective enquiry to improve their teaching practice and the learning performances of their students. Kambouri further suggested that when initiating any changes in the classroom, such an activity needs to take place in a supportive and safe learning environment, in order to allow teachers to be motivated towards implementing those required changes.

In the daily lives of the teachers' teaching and learning processes, they are constantly faced with teaching decisions that are based on trying and experiencing the changes, with little chance for reflection. At the same time, when they need to implement changes to their classroom practice, teachers are also dealing with daily interruptions to their class, such as managing disruptive behaviour. Outside the class, they are dealing with a range of additional issues such as sorting out administrative matters, doing school chores, and budgeting for school canteen resources. The teachers' sense of achievement generally comes when they feel they have covered the day's lessons well, have reached their lesson objectives, or have made positive impacts on their students' learning and development. So, change processes may be impeded at the level of an individual's practice.

### **3.7. Children's perceptions and learning experiences**

It is obvious that to understand children's learning or teachers' teaching processes, the context is significant; hence the process of learning and teaching is a culturally embedded practice (Lave and Wenger, 2005). Broström et al. (2015) mentioned that a) providing the opportunities for children to play, b) having opportunities to become active participants with other children and adults in the learning process, c) offering various activities to be experienced and d) to become engaged in the activities, are the conditions for children's learning to happen.

Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) highlight the need to develop a pedagogy based on young children's needs, rather than using the school subjects, and then adapting them

for the early childhood education level. Samuelsson and Sheridan (2010) supported the idea that learning has to develop both for teacher education and the preschool. However, there remain debates about the extent to which this knowledge can be specified in curriculum goals and teacher standards, and how much teachers develop their knowledge in the contexts of their practice.

School and classroom environments can be demanding for a child, especially when in large groups of children with only one or very few adults present. Teachers' capacity and ability in implementing changes in teaching and learning, take into account the diversity of the children's ability and learning needs. Children will be able to find voice when given the opportunity to share their perspectives, which may influence the structure of their classroom environment (Broadhead, 2009). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 12) mentions the rights of a child to express their views, "... the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child..." (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017). According to McTavish, Streelasky and Coles (2012, p. 265) listening to children's perspectives on their learning experiences has the possibility to influence any pedagogy or policy that impacts on their learning experiences in the classrooms. This view is further backed up by Rengel (2014) and Einarsdóttir (2007) who suggest that by doing research with children, and when they are the source of the data, they can provide insights to us as the adults, helping us to comprehend, conceptualise and interpret children's lives from their perspectives. Rengel (2014) further mentioned that by applying the interpretive approach with children, as the research participants, such a choice helps us to understand what children see as significant to them, and how they understand their environment. Therefore, this study has included children's perceptions about their learning experiences to enable us to understand their experiences at the time of Brunei's educational curriculum reform.

MacDonald (2015, p. 336) mentioned that "children are active learners" and learn better by having "direct engagement and experiences" such as through exploration, investigation, play, conversations with teachers, friends and family. MacDonald (2015) further mentioned that project-based learning provides the children with those experiences and opportunities to engage in their learning at any point. It helps to extend

their learning comprehension and creative thinking skills as the projects are “ongoing learning stories” which provide opportunities for children to check back on their learning whenever necessary (MacDonald, 2015, p. 336). Projects are not single activities or thematic units, but are ongoing and have no end point. The teachers will try to connect the experiences provided in implementing and exploring the different projects to ensure that the children are engaged with their learning by using different approaches to that learning (MacDonald, 2015). However, many of these ideas derive from Western theories of learning and teaching, and there are variations in how successfully these approaches can be implemented in different countries. This variety emphasises the significance of looking at change processes as ECE systems develop around the world, including influences on provision and practice.

Before we address the issue of understanding change processes in teaching and learning in the Brunei government’s preschools, we first need to understand what educational changes mean; then what the processes and models of implementing change are. These points are followed by a look into the responses to change, the factors that may cause roadblocks or contribute support towards change implementation, the leadership styles that facilitate or hinder change and ways to sustain the initiated changes. The next part of this chapter will also take into account the professional development of teachers; a topic which brings in the training opportunities for the teachers that may or may not act as support systems required in education reforms.

### **3.8. Definitions of educational change**

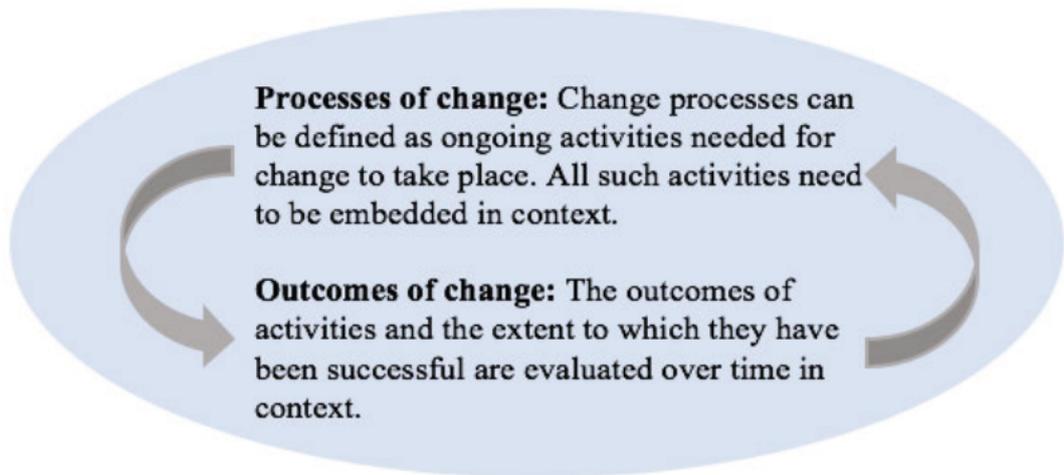
Ball (1998, p. 121) highlighted that international economic reforms had brought along “uncertainty and congestion”, specifically to changes in education policy. James and Connolly (2000, p. 16), defined change as “simply a matter of learning to do things differently...complex because it is inextricably linked to our emotions”. Fullan (2007, p. 7) identified the pressing reasons for reforms are because internationally society is increasingly “complex, requiring highly skilled educated citizens with life-long learning, and ability to work with diverse communities either locally or internationally”. Fullan (2007, p. 7) added that “reform is not just putting into place” but also altering the cultures of the classrooms, schools, universities and many other entities. He argued that in order to understand change in education reforms, one needs to remember the values, objectives and the consequences associated with educational changes. Fullan (2007, p. 7)

further added that there is also the necessity to comprehend the dynamics of educational change. This understanding will be informed by the socio-political process, which involves all individuals who are associated with the changes, with classroom, school, local, regional, and national factors working in collaboration.

Fullan (2007) stressed the importance of understanding change in education systems by highlighting the clearly shared meaning, in the change processes, of what needs to be done and the reasons encouraging the changes. If these factors are understood well, and clearly communicated by all involved in the change processes affecting teaching and learning, that understanding may contribute to the success of the change implementation. Shared meaning here refers to “getting to understand the meaning of requirements related to change is achieved by a group of people working together” (p. 37).

### **3.9. The process and models of implementing change**

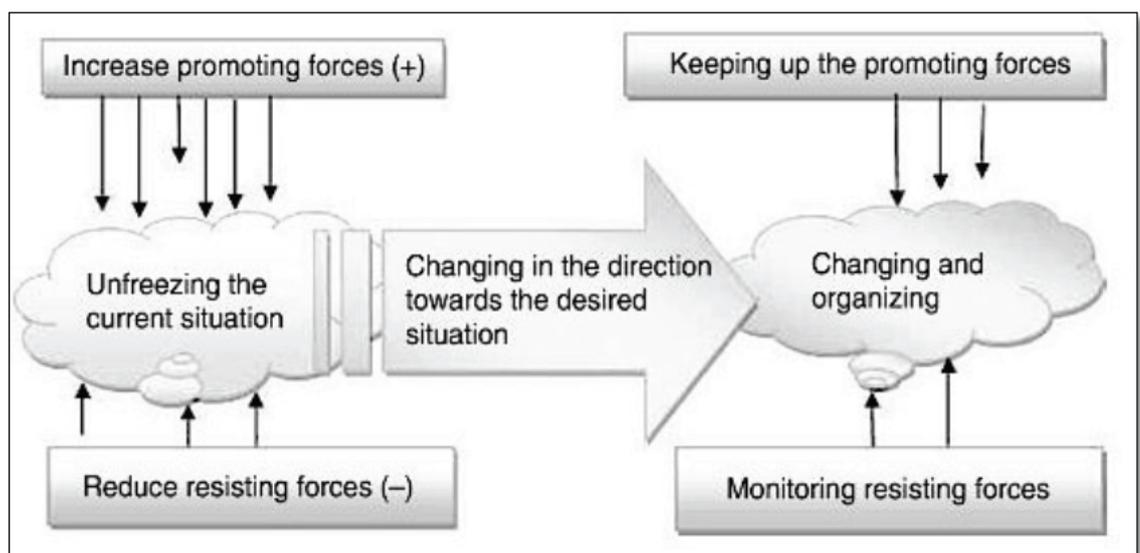
Change is a continuous process and understanding the contexts of the change processes is significant. Change processes involve and “affect the lives of organisation members” as organisations which are “continuously re-engineered, restructured, benchmarked, and subjected to myriad other macro- and micro- processes with the intention of changing the way things are done” (Jabri, 2012, p. 2). The change processes are expected to have an impact on the stakeholders who are the receivers of change: teachers, students and their parents. Jabri (2012, p. 7) mentioned that managing the impact of change is a skill which requires “knowledge, vision and insight”. The nature of change is unique in context and each context is an on-going state of instability. The processes of change are linked to the outcomes of the change in context, as shown in Figure 3.1 below.



**Figure 3.1. Process and response in context**  
 Source: Jabri (2012, p. 6)

According to Jabri (2012, p. 13), Lewin’s (1951) three-stage field model is often referred to when looking at reform and includes change processes of: 1) unfreezing; 2) movement; and 3) refreezing. The refreezing stage signals the continuous process of change; keeping up the promoting forces shown in Figure 3.2 (below) refers to resistance to the changes. Jabri (2012) further explained that Lewin’s field theory is characterised by:

- 1) Field theory relying on the physical forces of nature
- 2) In any organizational setting, there are forces that push for change and forces that constrain or act against, as shown below (p. 13).



**Figure 3.2. Lewin’s (1951) field theory**  
 Source: Jabri (2012, p. 13)

There are also other types of change models available, apart from Lewin’s (1951) three-step model: i) Weick and Quinn’s (1999) three-step model, ii) Ulrich (1988) seven-step model and iii) Kotter’s (1996) eight-step model, as summarised by Jabri (2012, p. 14) shown in Figure 3.3 below:

<b>Lewin’s (1951) three-step model</b>	<b>Weick and Quinn’s (1999) three-step model</b>
Unfreeze	Freeze
Movement	Rebalance and then reinterpret as opportunities
Refreezing (ice-topping)	Unfreeze
<i>Source: Adapted from Lewin (1951) and Weick and Quinn (1999).</i>	
<b>Ulrich’s (1988) seven-step model</b>	<b>Kotter’s (1996) eight-step model</b>
Lead change	Establish a sense of urgency
Create a shared need	Form a guiding coalition
Shape a vision	Create a vision
Mobilize commitment	Communicate the vision
Change systems and structures	Empower others to act
Monitor progress	Plan to create short-term wins
Make change last	Consolidate
	Ratify and legitimate
<i>Sources: Adapted from Ulrich (1998) and Kotter (1996).</i>	

**Figure 3.3. Some change models**  
**Source: cited in Jabri (2012, p. 14)**

Rodd (2015, p. 5) mentioned that the process of change typically includes “ideas and objectives on improvement, enhancement and advancement”. Rodd argues that:

“Changes that are well thought, planned and systematic action plans may sometimes be unsuccessful as this heavily depends on the stakeholders perceptions on the processes of change and potential outcomes. Whether the stakeholders perceive change as an improvement or advancement depends on a range of factors such as the reasons for change and the type, scale and pace of change...Many stakeholders willingly step up to the challenge of change, some may debate the extent to which any proposed change could result in improvement, while others may passively or actively construct efforts at implementation” (p. 5).

Rodd (2015, p. 6) suggests that the ECEC professionals in many countries are responding to complicated change agendas that require high levels of professional and personal commitment and expertise. She mentioned that change takes time, and that some teachers may express tensions and uncertainty about their capability of responding without having ample necessary resources to support the complexity and speed of change that is anticipated. Successful enactment of new education initiatives will involve learning how to do something new. The process of implementing change is undoubtedly a learning process, and teacher development moves in parallel with the initiated change or changes. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992, p. 1) and Rodd (2015, p. 23) refer to this situation as a cycle of learning. Rodd (2015, p. 23) mentioned the stages in the cycle of learning, as the processes of change are familiar to the teachers, being similar to the action research cycle. Rodd (2015) presented the seven steps in the process of change, as follows:

- 1) Identify, define and agree on the issue or concern to be improved. Create a shared inspirational vision. Communicate the need for change, situate it within a professional culture of learning, and evaluate preparedness for and readiness to change. Explain how the situation will look when changed.
- 2) Undertake a needs assessment to identify and prioritize factors that are relevant or may contribute to the need for change. Identify opportunities and impediments. Identify and motivate potential change champions and leadership partnerships.
- 3) Set specific goals and select appropriate strategies, decide what or who has to change and in what ways, who needs to be involved and sources of support, impediment and resistance.
- 4) Develop a feasible and achievable action plan that allocates tasks, responsibilities, people and other necessary resources, including a structure for regular reporting.
- 5) Implement and monitor action plans using agreed indicators, deliverables and timelines. Motivate ongoing commitment using change champions.
- 6) Analyse, evaluate and celebrate what has been achieved, make fine adjustments where necessary, identify what has been learned for future planning.
- 7) Start the next cycle based on what has been learned and on identified priorities (p. 23).

It is also helpful to look into the Fullan and Hargreaves (1992, p. 2) four component framework to understand the processes of change that teachers go through in their teaching development. The components are: 1) the teacher's *purpose*; 2) the teacher as a *person*; 3) the real world *context* in which teachers work; and 4) the *culture* of teaching: the working relationship with colleagues inside and outside the school. When initiating educational change, we need to remember that teachers have their own sets of beliefs, ideas, and practices; clearly they also have feelings and are human beings too, although when looking back some students might choose to disagree. Bridges (2009) addresses the point that when there is change there is always transition, and provides the basic equation to cover what change initiatives involve:

$$\text{change} + \text{human beings} = \text{transition}$$

Bridges (2009, p. 65) explains transition as the stage people, in this case teachers, go through before launching the change. Transitions take a lengthy time, as this is the phase where teachers are challenged with issues or problems surfacing with the new initiatives; those teachers are therefore obliged to begin searching for solutions to the problems, informed by the four main framework elements of Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) presented above. The context of where the teachers work is unique, as the transition is unique for that particular context. Once the teachers have tried the initiated change, by showing their capability and have then changed their set of beliefs and attitudes, this change serves as a reflection to successful implementation of initiated education reforms.

On the other hand, implementing educational change has at least three components according to Fullan (2007, p. 30-31): 1) materials in terms of instructional resources like curriculum materials, 2) teaching approaches such as adopting a different style of teaching, and 3) the possibility of changing one's beliefs accordingly to accommodate the new approaches to be reflected in their teaching practice. Fullan argued that these three components represent the necessary factors needed to achieve the required educational changes, and will only depend on the suitability in practice. Fullan (2007) further provides an explanation to his argument in using the three aspects needed for change, presented earlier. How the changes occur will depend on the teachers; whether they implement none of the dimensions, or choose one, two or all three dimensions.

Fullan provided examples to illustrate the meaning of the following; if the teachers were to take only the first aspect (the new curriculum) and second aspect (teaching approaches) of the dimensions of change in their teaching and learning process, they are not initiating a shift in their beliefs practices underlying the changes. As a result of this situation, change will only be at the surface level. It was further explained that even if the teachers were to only take aspect one (curriculum) then the teacher is also at the same state; changing only at the surface level, rather than in depth or wholly. Therefore, the teacher is only delivering the new curriculum, without applying the new teaching strategies and with no alteration to her or his beliefs. Fullan's definition for implementing educational change is appropriate and significant as part of the purpose of this study is to conceptualise educational change processes in the Brunei preschool education system. Applying Fullan's dimensions on implementing change will help guide the analysis and identify the way change has been introduced, implemented and monitored in the Bruneian context of educational change processes.

Fullan (2007, p. 31-33) acknowledged that the three dimensions in implementing change come with three complications that need to be addressed:

- 1) the uncertainty that the dimensions provide regarding who prepares the curriculum or who develops the materials; either it rests on the researcher, curriculum developer, or teachers;
- 2) the problem and tension in educational change has two perspectives: the fidelity perspective and the mutual adaptation or evolutionary perspective approach to change. The fidelity approach means the assumption that already developed innovation exists and the task is to get the teachers to implement it faithfully in practice as intended by the curriculum developer. The mutual adaptation perspective on the other hand, emphasised change as consequence of adaptations and judgements made by the way the teachers work with new policies and the teachers position seen as mutually determining the outcome of change, and,
- 3) the difficulties of clarifying and accomplishing changes in practice, which involve the interrelationship of beliefs, teaching approaches, and resources, need to be clearly specified.

Fullan (2007, p. 33) further provided the argument that the difficulty to specifying the third dimension (beliefs) is because those beliefs may get transformed, further developed, or otherwise altered during implementation. However, using these three dimensions of implementing change processes in teaching and learning will provide added value to understanding the change processes in teaching and learning that are currently happening in the Brunei government's preschools.

As a summary to Fullan's (2007, p. 36) three dimensions in implementing change, he debated and questioned why we need 'to worry' about the three dimensions of change. He provided the answer that his approach does not satisfactorily identify how individuals come to confront or avoid behavioural and conceptual implications of change:

“Change in teaching approach or style in using new materials presents greater difficulty if new skills must be acquired and new ways of conducting instructional activities established. Changes in beliefs are even more difficult. They challenge the core values held by individuals regarding the purposes of education. Moreover, beliefs are often not explicit, discussed, or understood, but rather are buried at the level of unstated assumptions. And the development of new understandings is essential because it provides a set of criteria for overall planning and a screen for sifting valuable from not-so-valuable learning opportunities. The ultimate question, of course, is how essential are all three dimensions of change. The use of new materials by themselves may accomplish certain educational objectives, but it seems obvious that developing new teaching skills and approaches and understanding conceptually what and why something should be done, and to what end, represents much more fundamental change, and as such will take longer to achieve but will have a greater impact once accomplished” (p. 36).

Apart from Fullan's (2007) ideas on the dimensions of change, Luecke (2003, p. 67) has identified six essential activities for implementation in a change programme, as listed below:

- 1) Recruiting and assembling key people with the right skills, authority, resources and leadership to provide support. This means assembling a team with the right blend of skills, authority, resources and leadership.
- 2) Constructing a good implementation plan. This means to keep the plan simple, flexible, divided into achievable amounts, and with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

- 3) Supporting the plan with consistent behaviours. This means to ensure that management “walks the talk.”
- 4) Developing “enabling structures”. This means training, pilot, programs, and alignment if the rewards system is also part of the change objectives.
- 5) Celebrating milestones. This means to identify important milestones in the project and celebrate them when they are reached.
- 6) Communicating relentlessly. This means to keep telling them why, telling them how, and telling them often.

James and Connolly (2000), McLean and Moyer (1997) and Speck (1996) all concur that change is difficult and perpetual. Kirk (2014, p. 82) mentioned education reforms are “complicated and a difficult perpetual process”, as the process is intertwined with political and social dimensions, including the traditional values practiced between the education of the country’s youths and wider social objectives. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2011) and Grieshaber and Ryan (2015) further acknowledged curriculum change to be a challenging process to introduce and to then sustain.

The structure of educational institutions is typically hierarchical, with a top-down model of directed changes that are commonly unsuccessful in realising the reform objectives, due to the disconnection that exists within the structural framework of education (Kirk, 2015, p. 83). In addition to that, if new practices are to be implemented in the revised education models, they will need time to progress, as change needs a) the involvement of several stakeholders, b) a long period of enactment and c) is tangled with traditional practices and beliefs (Kirk, 2015, p. 83).

There are two types of changes as explained by Luecke (2003, p. 110), and cited accordingly:

- 1) Discontinuous change: a single, abrupt shift from the past followed by a long period of stability where another major change often needs to be made.
- 2) Continuous incremental change: a series of small, discrete changes over a long period of time.

Luecke (2003, p. 111) added that continuous incremental change has its benefits whereby: a) small changes are manageable, b) it is less disruptive, c) it has more success

potential and d) the model is able to maintain organisation of the intended changes. Recurring exposure enables familiarisation towards the changes and prepares people to implement them.

### **3.10. Responses to Change**

ECEC sectors are responding to various mandated government policies, and the ECEC professionals need to come up with their own opinions and beliefs on ways to enhance and develop teaching and learning quality in the classrooms. Policy is received and interpreted differently among different cultures and is informed by each country's ideology. Moyles, Payler and Georgeson (2014) mentioned that teachers are seen as willing to accept mandated changes that they experienced from their daily teaching and learning experience. Rodd (2015, p. 3) argued that teachers' roles are not limited to receivers of change but they are also "instigators, moderators, and guardians, responsible for ensuring that any changes in legislation, policies and regulations that affects their practice are in the best interest of the children and families". Furthermore, Rodd (2015, p. 3) and Fullan (1993) mentioned the importance of ECEC professionals believing that they can impact change, in order to benefit children's learning progress.

Luecke (2003, p. 86-87), identified four emotional stages, in order to construct a theory of how people respond to change processes: 1) shock, 2) defensive retreat, 3) acknowledgement, and 4) acceptance and adaptation. Luecke further explained that some people get through the four stages quickly and others with caution and slow progress, and some may even get stuck. The differences in the way people respond to the change processes are because change is untidy and is not a straightforward process; the personal experiences people have with change differ, depending on individual contexts. Resistance towards change is part of the natural change process towards adaptation (Luecke, 2003, p. 97). Luecke advised that one should not look at resistance as roadblocks towards change, but to understand why the resistance existed, as the reasons behind it may help to understand and offer opportunities for effective change implementation.

The increasing educational change agendas and government objectives placed upon teachers have challenged teachers' professional capacities to comprehend and implement the initiated changes. Rodd (2015, p. 4), revealed that ECEC teachers are

confronted by the high expectations to practice the mandated educational policy changes, but are rarely recognised and appreciated for their everyday struggle and efforts in developing and improving their practice.

### **3.11. Factors that contribute as roadblocks or that support the implementation of change**

James and Connolly (2000, p. 18-20) refers to Connor's (1995) nine factors for resisting change by looking at them as natural reactions intertwined with anxiety. The nine factors are listed below:

- 1) Lack of trust
- 2) Belief that change is unnecessary
- 3) Belief that change is not feasible
- 4) Economic threats
- 5) The relatively high cost
- 6) Fear of failure
- 7) Loss of status and power
- 8) Threats to values and ideals
- 9) Resentment of interference

James and Connolly (2000, p. 20) argued that the resistance factors suggested by Connor (1995) and listed above, contain energy and will therefore be of benefit if the resistance energy is turned to commitment for improving change. The authors further added that adaptability to change needs to be nurtured at the very beginning because, if left unattended, resistance may lead to roadblocks of implementing the change(s) required.

Most educational reforms are unsuccessful due to the failure of planning that does not “take into account the local context and culture, that is dangerously seductive and incomplete, with too much emphasis on planning rather than action” (Fullan, 2007, p. 108).

On the other hand, positive and appropriate change in ECEC is through successful and effective leadership (Rodd, 2015, p. 7). Fullan (1993, p. 4) mentioned that for change to be effective, “educators must see themselves as experts in the dynamics of change. To

become experts in the dynamics of change, educators - administrators and teachers alike- must become skilled change agents". Fullan (2007) further emphasised that if educators can understand the reasons for the change required, understand the mandated changes, and be able to converse amongst themselves regarding their implementation of their own teaching and learning practice, the situation may result in effective change. Fullan's idea is supported by Rodd (2015, p. 2), that today's government reform intentions are based on the assumption of a professional capability to comprehend and react to the mandated changes accordingly.

Taylor (2011, p. 222) highlights three ways to realise transformation in practice:

- 1) the theoretical and normative complications of the change need to be resolved, as well as bringing the experts to work together with the group of educators;
- 2) leaders and managers to embrace a new education concept and learning framework to guide children's programs providing support and partnership; and
- 3) research is necessary to guide the transformation process, concentrating on enactment of new programs, their effectiveness, and the child and family outcomes.

Jabri (2012, p. 15-16) has identified that lack of practicality is the main factor contributing to unsuccessful reforms. On the other hand, Jabri (2012) has recognised factors that can help successful reform:

- 1) the values towards achieving the vision need to be embraced;
- 2) discrepancies need to be sorted; and
- 3) the vision statement provided with thorough plans (p. 15-16).

Therefore, attention is drawn to any issues, either anticipated or arising during the introduction or the implementation phase of the education reform; issues that need to be addressed such as conflict with the culture of how things are done. This focus will then help to make clear the objectives and understanding for all of those involved in the education reforms, in order for them to work and implement the changes effectively and systematically.

### **3.12. Leadership**

Li (2015) has identified two characteristics of leadership practice that are used efficiently to bring about important changes in teachers' practices: i) instructional leadership and ii) transformational leadership in ECEC. Li explained instructional leadership as the principal providing practical ways for the school to move towards educational change and improvement. Li then explained that transformational leadership involves different types of distributed leadership with staff empowerment and shared collaborations. Distributed leadership has become a favoured strategy to achieve anticipated management plans and is popular in ECEC in this 21<sup>st</sup> century (Li, 2015; Bush and Glover, 2014). Transformational leadership has an impact on teachers' willingness to accept, or even consider, educational changes (Li, 2015, p. 436).

Parry (2011, p. 53) mentioned that power is distributed within organisations. The influences of power and leadership are interrelated; power being needed to initiate and drive changes in organisations (Ho, 2012; Parry 2011). Ho (2012) mentioned that power distribution is essential to understanding the leadership phenomenon in ECEC. Leaders can "exercise power, control and influence, such as constructing strategies and visions, shaping structures and cultures, monitoring work" (Collinson, 2011, p. 185). Change that is accomplished by forced power, due to the positions of the enforcers, cannot be maintained or sustained. Kilduff and Balkundi (2011, p. 129) explained that distributed leadership acts as an alternative leadership model which increases impact within the members of a work team. This kind of leadership is associated with high levels of policy implementation. By introducing key people to become leaders within the organisation, in this study's context a school, leaders can increase the leadership potential within schools and mentor their colleagues in the organisation, in order to facilitate successful educational change implementation. Kilduff and Balkundi added that mentoring in distributed leadership is a component of leadership efficiency. However, it should be noted that research on teacher leadership cannot be generalised as the findings are unique to each context.

Ho's (2012) study examines the paradox of power in Hong Kong's education reforms by acknowledging that global discourses on educational change agendas added pressure to the government to involve stakeholders in the change processes. By using distributive and transformational leadership practices, Ho found that the leaders in Chinese early

childhood settings were confronted with leadership roles and, as a result, were struggling to uphold traditional leadership roles predicated upon top down power distribution and the associated leadership values.

On the other hand, Harris (2004) suggested that “successful heads recognise the limitations of a singular leadership approach” and leadership is “distributed through collaborative and joint working” (p. 560). This approach is useful as it helps address issues arising from the introduction and implementation of change, especially when the organisation is lacking skilled leaders. This problem can be overcome by training some selected leaders to help manage, deliver and monitor the change accordingly.

### **3.13. Ways to sustain initiated changes in education**

Significant sustainable educational changes in the ECEC settings are influenced by how leaders think, as well as what they say and do. Successful leadership facilitates educational change i) by making the teachers feel they are ready for change, ii) by providing information about the changes required, iii) by persuading, iv) by encouraging, v) by questioning, vi) by challenging and vii) by engaging all concerned to appreciate the barriers to change. This approach can be real but sometimes may appear as the effects of people’s way of thinking, past experiences and emotional responses. Rodd (2015, p. 7) mentioned that efficient early-years’ leaders work collaboratively with teachers to form a grounded culture of “professional values, positive, high expectations, personal initiative, quality work and collective responsibility”. Simultaneously, those leaders do all they can to build a supportive workplace culture grounded in respect, trust, cooperation and community that protects, encourages and empowers everybody during the potentially stressful processes of change (Rodd, 2015, p. 7).

Fullan (2010, p. 59) mentioned that to sustain initiated educational changes, teachers, and not the programme, are the main crux as drivers of successful change. When teachers are focused and able to work collaboratively, they help towards creating a successful impact on the initiated education changes, as they are aware of what works from their own research experiences.

There are three factors presented by Luecke (2003, p. 111) that contribute towards continuous incremental change or by sustaining the changes:

- 1) preparing organizations to be change-ready,
- 2) managing continuous internal and external monitoring, and
- 3) delivering people with meaningful anchors, which provide a sense of routine, familiarity and continuity.

In other words, the three factors mentioned by Luecke (2003) above are important to help those responsible to think about and address the way the education reforms need to be introduced. Thinking and planning ahead makes the forthcoming changes manageable and more likely to be sustained, along with the monitoring of the progress of change and establishing routines. When one of the factors is missing or not delivered and managed well, it may lead to the notion of resistance to change.

### **3.14. Teacher training and professional development**

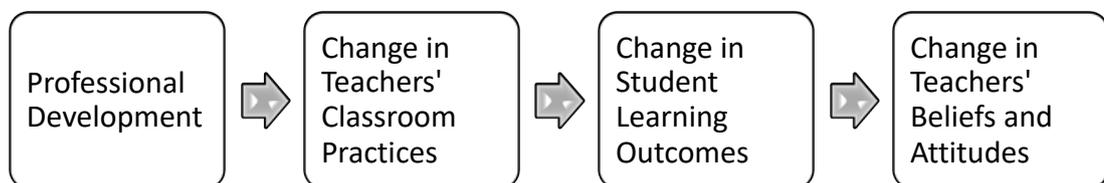
Educational changes bring in and require a lot of training through professional development to help support teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices when faced with their implementation (Horden, 2013). Fullan and Hargreaves (1992, p. 2) reasoned the characteristics for teachers' professional development should comprise of both formal components (workshops) and informal components (teachers exchanging ideas by discussions) that are related to changes to educational practice during the implementation stage of educational changes.

The pressure for change creates further challenges for the teachers, particularly in equipping them with appropriate competence to achieve government targets. It is further argued by Rodd (2015, p. 2) that if teachers have experienced lengthy years of changes, but are only provided with limited training and support, such situations can cause a barrier to acceptance as they are exhausted and cautious of acknowledging more demands for change.

Professional standards are also pressured as these are involved in the international discourse relating to education reforms. The increase in calls for high quality ECEC services has also impacted on the teachers; there are now drivers from governments to have all graduate teaching forces. Waters and Payler (2015, p. 162) stated that teachers'

qualification levels for ECEC have been raised in England, Australia, and the USA. On the other hand, although the number of teaching graduates has increased, the majority of the ECEC teachers internationally are not graduate teachers. Therefore, professional learning needs to cater to diverse ECEC academic backgrounds, to enable opportunities for everyone to become highly proficient and competent, thereby enabling every teacher to competently implement the prescribed educational reforms.

Growing levels of attention towards the demand to raise the quality of ECEC settings, have led to the increased requirement for professional training of those involved in the change processes, especially the teachers. To facilitate change, Guskey (2002) provided a model of teacher change in professional development, as a way of supporting teachers' beliefs and attitudes (see Figure 3.4 below). Changes in teachers' professional development is only possible when teachers have experienced trying out any new teaching method, the use of new materials or curriculum or any changes in classroom teaching and learning. Significant changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs then take place, after the teachers have experienced delivering the new practice and have seen that the new practice offers evidence of increments in students' achievements. The experience of successful implementation and evidence provides valuable support that the new approach works so enabling, or at least encouraging, the teachers to change their attitudes and beliefs. Figure 3.4 below shows the patterns of the major goals of three professional development programmes which are: i) change in teachers' classroom practices, ii) change in students' learning outcomes and iii) change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes.



**Figure 3.4. Guskey (2002) model of teacher change**

Guskey (2002) further explains that the model above also reviews the process of teacher change, in order to act as a guide for effective professional development programmes. It is argued that professional development programmes that fail to consider teachers' motivation to be involved and engaged with the change processes that usually occur, will inevitably become an ineffective programme. Guskey (2002) highlighted support for the teachers' changes in a) their perceptions, b) their beliefs and c) their behaviour is provided and facilitated by professional development training initiatives.

For the implementation of change to be sustained Fullan (2007, p. 37) emphasised the need to address the understanding of teachers' beliefs and behaviours towards the teaching approaches to be addressed, via a continuous learning platform shared with other teachers. It is appropriate for the discussions to take place after the teachers have experienced trying to implement the new teaching strategies. Hence, the continuous learning platform and discussions provide a further benefit to professional teachers' learning development. Fullan (2010, p. 90) proposed that policymakers need to acknowledge and understand that teachers make changes to children's learning and to acknowledge that therefore "each and every teacher must be very good".

It is important for teachers to understand the new curricula well, in order to enable them to provide effective teaching and learning to achieve the desired learning outcomes, as specified in each curriculum. The continuous professional development (CPD) training for the teachers needs to be in line with the new curricula to provide support for the teachers in facilitating the teaching and learning for the children (SEAMEO and UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, professional learning development needs to support the quality of a "systematic, sustainable and transformative" approach to enable the ECEC teachers to be proficient in delivering high quality teaching and learning (Waters and Payler, 2015, p. 165).

CPD is usually provided to help and support the implementation of educational changes by applying the model of CPD and matching to its training purpose and requirement. There are nine spectra of CPD models presented by Kennedy (2014) in Figure 3.5 below, with the three categories of purpose model: i) transition, ii) transitional and iii) transformative. The nine types of CPD models are explained and summarised briefly from Kenny (2014, p. 338-348) as follows;

- 1) The training model of CPD provides teachers with the passive role of receiving training concerning specific new knowledge delivered by an 'expert'. The training model is a decontextualised venue which is out of school.
- 2) The award-bearing model involves accreditation and certification of an award-bearing study programme, authorised by universities, to provide quality assurance for the teachers.
- 3) The deficit model used in CPD is designed to support and resolve weaknesses observed in teacher practice.
- 4) The cascade model includes teachers attending 'training events' independently and then cascading or spreading the information and material to colleagues. This model supports a technical interpretation of sharing learning and teaching skills, and knowledge is regarded as more important than attitudes and values.
- 5) The standards-based model uses standards to support professional development and deliver shared understanding, particularly involving professional discussion between teachers.
- 6) The coaching/mentoring model of CPD is dependent on one-to-one relationships between teachers, aiming towards increased professional learning by sharing confidential professional dialogue with colleagues.
- 7) The community of practice model comprises of two or more people and the existence of a learning community as a result of professional interactions. Learning in a community of practice can either be positive and proactive or a passive experience. Power is regarded as significant in the community of practice model and can act as powerful positions of transformation, where the amount of whole individual knowledge and experience is enhanced through shared work.
- 8) The action research model enables teachers to be critical of their practice and may change the power balance from policy to the teachers through identification and implementation of related teaching-research activities. This model has the capacity for facilitating transformative practice and professional autonomy.
- 9) Finally, the transformative model is the combination of practices and conditions that support a transformative agenda. The transformative model

helps to balance the teachers' power during the implementation of change processes, which enables them to identify, evaluate, adopt and adapt the changes into their classroom context.

Therefore, the distinct purposes of CPD will require different models of CPD, as explained earlier and presented in Figure 3.5 below.

<b>Model of CPD</b>	<b>Purpose of Model</b>	
The training model The award-bearing model The deficit model The cascade model	Transmission	
The standards-based model The coaching/mentoring model The community of practice model	Transitional	
The action research model The transformative model	Transformative	

**Figure 3.5. Spectrum of CPD models**  
Source: Kennedy (2014, p. 349)

### 3.15. Summary

In this chapter, it has been argued that there is no one right method to lead change in early childhood education, as that change or changes will depend on several factors including: a) communication and interpersonal competence; b) a culture of ongoing learning and development; c) critical thinking and reflection; d) collaboration and collective responsibility; e) consolidation of new learning and practice into daily routine; f) conflict resolution and consensus; and g) a compelling vision that champions continuous quality improvement (Rodd, 2015, p. 138). The purpose of this study is to explore some of these concepts and trends in the context of policy and practice changes in Brunei's preschool education system. The following chapter identifies the research methodology and design employed to achieve this aim.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to gather data for this study: “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study”. This methodology chapter will address the following issues: i) the research aims and questions, ii) the orientation of the research, iii) the theoretical framework of the study, iv) sampling, v) the methods of data collection along with the justifications for the chosen methods adopted in this research, vi) the pilot study, vii) stages of data collection, viii) approach to analysis of the data, ix) ethical considerations and x) the summary.

### 4.2. Research aims and questions

Allow me to restate the research aims and questions to provide a clearer explanation of the research design and methodology in this study. As explained in Section 1.4, one aim of this research is to understand the change processes in teaching and learning that are currently going on in Brunei government preschools. Another aim of this research is to find out the Bruneian preschool teachers’ and children’s teaching and learning experiences in the preschool classes at this exciting time of curriculum reform. In addition, the researcher will observe how teachers are developing their lessons, and implementing reform processes with the expected pedagogical practice, together with how children are learning in class taking into account their experiences. The study will also explore, via the ministerial level at the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and the Curriculum Department Unit, a) “what are the units’ expectations in terms of the change processes as these occur?” and b) “how will the civil servants in both units support the preschool teachers?”

To achieve the above aims, the following research questions that guide this research are provided as follows:

- 1) What are the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool education system?
- 2) In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?

- 3) How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, in organising the environment, and in implementing the curriculum?
- 4) How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?
- 5) What are the Ministry of Education officers' perspectives regarding teachers and children in monitoring the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools?

The research questions are constructed as a result of my own curiosity regarding the change processes that are ongoing in the Brunei preschool education system. I worked at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, as a lecturer in early childhood education from 2008. However, in 2010- 2012, prior to my departure for my doctoral programme at the University of Sheffield, UK, I had the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Department of Schools, ECCE Unit, and the Curriculum Development Department, under the Ministry of Education, Brunei. 2010 was the year I was working with the Department of Schools, and the ECCE Unit, under the Ministry of Education. I joined with the staff in making several school visits to monitor the progress of the SPN21 in Brunei government preschools, as manifested in classroom practice across the districts. The preschool visits provided me with knowledge about teachers' pedagogical practice, prior to embarking this research. What I witnessed was mostly a) teacher directed, with memorising and drilling practice for the children, b) little emphasis on children's creativity, c) using colouring worksheet activities, d) the display of more bought posters in the classroom but with minimal displays of children's work, e) resources in the classroom that were not organised and f) a lack of child-appropriate reading materials in the reading corners. There was a gap in visiting the schools from 2011 until 2013, due to increased work commitments at the university and the demands relating to applying for the doctoral course. The years 2011 and 2012 marked the start of rigorous changes introduced by the ECCE Unit towards the teaching and learning of Pra, as mentioned in Section 2.18. The research questions are also related to the literature in contemporary issues of early childhood education changes in policy and practice (see Chapter 3). The changes introduced to the preschool landscape in Brunei also triggered my curiosity. The changes motivated me to find out and understand what the teachers' lived experiences are in going through the change processes in transforming their classroom

environment and practice. I was also curious to find out what the preschool settings looked like in these times of change. In addition, I wanted to know how the children perceived their learning experiences; as well as how the senior officers as policy makers positions viewed the progress of change at the preschool level.

### **4.3. Orientation of research**

This study's research design is exploratory, to facilitate understanding the change processes in the Brunei preschool education system, and is driven by a mixed methods approach. By using the mixed methods approach, richer findings can be provided than by just using a quantitative or qualitative research design separately. The mixing and blending of the two approaches can assist in yielding broader empirical data and evidence relating to the phenomena observed (Yin, 2015, p. 659). The research design for this study started with the quantitative and qualitative mix of the questionnaire and the topic was then explored further with more qualitative aspects of data collection. Therefore, this mixed method design rests heavily on the qualitative approach. By doing so, the design allows for a rich exploration of the phenomena studied, which are the change processes in Brunei's preschool education system. This approach also provides flexibility in the methods that are used to gain understanding of the mentioned phenomena. Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 220) stated that investigation and exploration of a phenomena is learning that is emphasised on "context-dependent knowledge and experience". Flyvbjerg (2006) further highlighted two important themes: i) the familiarity and ii) the understanding of the real lived contexts, as this helps with several rich details:

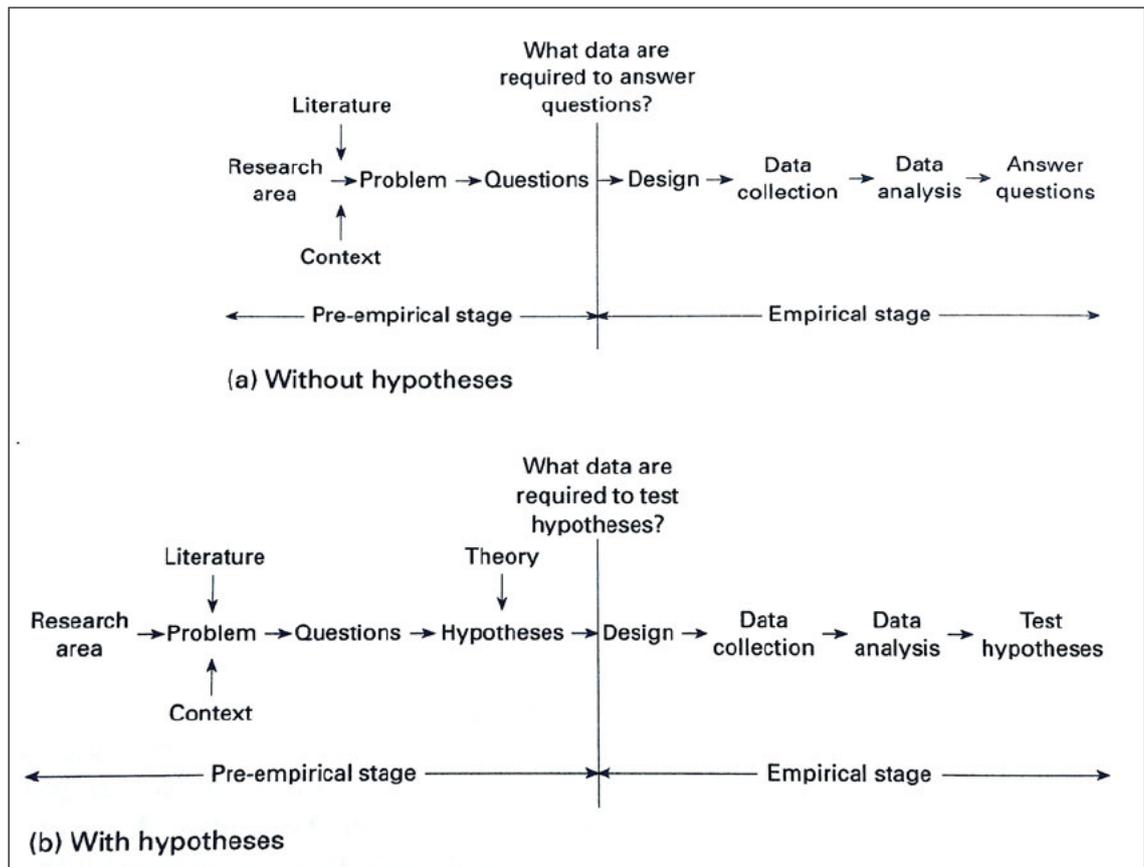
"First, it is important for the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process and in much theory. Second, cases are important for researchers' own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research. If researchers wish to develop their own skills to a high level, then concrete, context-dependent experience is just as central for them as to professionals learning any other specific skills" (p. 220).

To understand the research process and design, Punch (2001, p. 42) presented a simplified model of research, as shown in Figure 4.1 (below) to aid in the designing, the planning, the delivery and the report writing of the research. The model of research presented by Punch (2001) emphasises four criteria:

- 1) framing the research in terms of research questions,

- 2) determining what data are necessary to answer those questions,
- 3) designing research to collect and analyse those data,
- 4) using the data to answer the questions (p. 42).

The model of research in Figure 4.1 shows two types of the research questions: one without hypotheses and the other with hypotheses.



**Figure 4.1. Simplified model of research**

Source: Punch (2001, p. 42)

As the nature of my research questions are mostly informed by the qualitative queries of “what?” and “how?”, the model in the research design is without hypotheses. Therefore, by referring to the above model, specifically the model without any hypotheses, it shows the similarity of my research design process, whereby the pre-empirical stage involves reading of the research literature and understanding the context (setting). This reading is followed by identifying the problems and coming up with the research questions, without any hypotheses or expectations; the activity is purely to explore the phenomena. The empirical stage is then made up of a) planning the design of the research by identifying the appropriate methods for data collection, b) gathering data, c)

analysing the data to propose answers for the research questions, and d) explanations for events.

I have also adopted a mixed method approach of collecting data to enable me to explore and provide an overview of the change processes in teaching and learning that are happening in Brunei preschools via several methods. The advantage of using a mixed methods approach to social exploration is that it provides “meaningful engagement with and dialogue across not just different types of methods and data but also different logics of inquiry, different ways of knowing” (Greene, 2015, p. 608). The mixed methods approach offers different insights into understanding the social phenomena. For the purpose of this study, data collection was focused on four key aspects in early childhood education and care: i) the setting (management and curriculum); ii) teachers, iii) children and iv) officers at the Ministry of Education. The perspectives and experiences of both teachers and children, in implementing the changes in teaching and learning processes, are sought. I also explored how the teachers implemented and managed their teaching and learning in their daily activities in the preschool settings, as well as the support that contributed to the implementation of the change processes. The children’s learning experiences are also sought to provide added value to the research in how they are experiencing their learning.

Burns (2000, p. 419) added that triangulation backs the qualitative data analysis validation as the use of several methods in collecting data provides the reliability of findings across the methods used. In addition, Robert-Holmes (2005, p. 40) considered triangulation as an opportunity for providing the researcher with the chance to check their data gained from the different use of methods. Hence, the methods adopted in this study are i) questionnaires, ii) unstructured observations, iii) semi-structured interviews, iv) policy documents and v) planning approaches. Stake (2005, p. 453) added that the benefits of using triangulation are to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretations by using various perceptions to explain and clarify the observed in-depth interpretation from the way it is observed. In addition Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), Stake (2005) and Thomas (2011) all remarked that the qualitative researcher is keen to explore from a variety of insights, or sources, to enable them to understand the experiences of the participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of triangulation helps the researcher to identify different perceptions towards the phenomena being investigated.

Stake (2005, p. 444) explains that the use of qualitative research helps in understanding the phenomena, as progress is guided by the research questions. The credibility of qualitative research rests on the way data are triangulated, together with deep insights into the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, qualitative research is a continuous process throughout the period of the study, whereby member-checking throughout adds rigour and credibility to the interpreted data. Rigour and credibility of qualitative research refers to documenting the unusual and identifying the norms of practice, the access to the setting, the way data are collected and analysed and the writing up of the research. The primary focus of qualitative research design is to achieve an in-depth understanding and therefore typically uses small-scale research designs and observations in natural settings (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Wiersma, 2000). Creswell (2015, p. 5) illustrates the advantages of qualitative research in its ability to give comprehensive views of the participants' experiences and voices. In qualitative research, the participants' views are generated from the participants themselves; another strength of the qualitative model is the ability to provide insightful narratives. Thus, the main strength of a qualitative approach is being able to explore a phenomenon that is not available somewhere else, due to contextual differences (Silverman, 2011, p. 17). On the other hand, there are disadvantages to the qualitative research design as presented by Creswell (2015, p. 5). Among these impediments are: a) having small samples of participants, b) being subjective, c) providing soft data without numbers, d) limitations in providing generalisability and e) restricting the researcher's expertise by relying on the participants without involving other methods. The qualitative research design is appropriate for this study to enable me to understand the change processes in Brunei preschools, as the nature of the qualitative paradigm is informed by exploration and discovery (Silverman, 2006). Figure 4.2 below provides the justification regarding why this research design is driven by qualitative approaches, as presented by Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez and Frost (2015, p. 5). My ontological and epistemological perspectives define my view of how I perceive the reality and nature of knowledge by observing and understanding reality naturally, and by understanding multiple views which construct what each social actor is doing and presenting. This process is as mentioned by Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez and Frost (2015, p. 5) and is referred to in Figure 4.2 by viewing social reality as multiple and complex. Then, the types of questions constructed in my study are mostly in the form of "how?" and "what?" questions. Next,

the type of data collected includes a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, classroom observations, interview with teachers, children and senior officers involved with policy making, and document analysis. The goal of the qualitatively driven approach, as discussed above, is to understand the processes of change in teaching and learning in Brunei’s preschools.

	Subjective ←—————→ Objective	
	<b>Qualitatively Driven</b>	<b>Quantitatively Driven</b>
<b>Ontology: What is the nature of the reality?</b>	<b>Social reality is multiple.</b>	<b>There is a concrete social world “out there”.</b>
<b>Epistemology: What can we know and who can know?</b>	Goal is to understand multiple subjectivities. Individuals are the “experts”. Through intersubjectivity we understand human behaviours. There is no definite subject-object split in knowledge building.	Goal is to ascertain “the truth” in order to predict and even uncover “laws” of human behaviour through objective social inquiry. Scientists are the experts.
<b>Types of questions</b>	The purpose of this research is to understand (the what, how, and why).	Statement of relationship between independent and dependent variable. Questions phrased in terms of a hypothesis.
<b>Types of data collected</b>	Naturalistic settings: Participant observation (fieldwork) In-depth interviews Focus groups Unobtrusive data: Documents	Surveys, experiments: Randomised controlled trials Systematic reviews/meta-analyses
<b>Type of analysis</b>	Inductive: Goal is to generate theory. Looks for general theme patterns in the data. Uses “thick descriptions”. Compares and contrasts thematic data. Specific types of analysis examples:  Grounded theory, narrative analysis	Deductive: Test out hypothesis. Explain variation in the independent variables by controlling the dependent variables. Stress is on statistical measurement.
<b>Goal</b>	Understand a “process”.	Generalise, predict, and control research outcomes.

**Figure 4.2. Qualitatively driven and quantitatively driven approaches compared on several key research dimensions along a subjective-objective continuum**

**Source: Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez and Frost (2015, p. 5)**

Quantitative design, as illustrated in Figure 4.2 by Hesse-Biber et al. (2015, p. 5) above, takes the position that there is only one 'truth' to the understanding of reality. Hypotheses are formed before the research design is implemented and used in the design to test out each hypothesis by stressing statistical measurements. The main goal of quantitative driven research is to predict, control and generalise about research outcomes. Creswell (2015, p. 5) mentioned the advantages of quantitative research are its ability to provide conclusions for a large sample of participants, efficiency in analysing data, exploration of data relationships, ability to control bias, ability to provide the causes and effects in a controlled setting and preference for statistics. On the other hand, Creswell (2015) stated the disadvantages of quantitative research are that it is 'impersonal and dry', it is unable to give exact records of participants' voices, and it offers only a rigid understanding of the participants' contexts and actions (p. 5). Relying only on a quantitative design does not suit my research; the purpose of which is to understand the phenomena of change. Hence the quantitative design provides limitations if it were to be the sole paradigm adopted in this study. Such limitations would be seen in the difficulty of interpreting how the teachers and children respond naturally in their classroom settings, in implementing the required changes to the teaching and learning in Pra. This limitation is because a qualitative researcher cannot deliver a comprehensive investigation into the phenomena when the setting is controlled by others with restrictions, conditions or variables. It is argued by Silverman (2011, p. 16), that "quantification may *sometimes* be useful to reveal the basic social processes" in order to provide a clear interpretation of the qualitative findings. Therefore, a mixed methods research model is suitable for this study to provide understanding by using multiple qualitative approaches to discover in more detail the change processes taking place in Brunei's preschools.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined grounded theory as "theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another" (p. 12). Punch (2001) mentioned grounded theory as a "research strategy whose purpose is to generate theory from data" (p. 163). Grounded theory is suitable for this study due to the dynamic phenomenon of understanding change processes in the Brunei preschools. To get a deeper and richer understanding, the grounded theory approach was applied to this study. Creswell (2015) mentioned that in grounded theory, the

theory is generated from the participants' perceptions in that particular context, and not solely from a predetermined theory applied from other studies and samples. Therefore, grounded theory is appropriate for this study as hypotheses are not formed at the beginning of this study and data are obtained which are close and natural to the real-life context. My study will be solely focused on inquiry in order to make meaning from the data generated from investigating the change processes that are happening in the Brunei preschool context.

#### **4.4. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This study is informed by the philosophical position of a pragmatic approach. The foundations of a pragmatic approach are based on its practical concerns (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). Creswell (2015) mentioned pragmatism as research philosophy determined by the “consequences of research, the problem, and what works in real-world practice” (p. 124). A pragmatic approach, as described by Hammond and Wellington (2013), is “one which takes a practical orientation to a problem and finds a solution that is fit for a particular context” (p. 125). Furthermore, pragmatism is a unique approach which requires the researcher to justify their logic of how they view or interpret the world and to focus on “what works” for their research (Hammond and Wellington, 2013, p. 125). This approach allows me to use mixed methods to provide different types of data and analysis, so as to contribute to a rich understanding regarding the research problem reported in this study.

To study the conception of change processes in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools, this study is using an interpretive research model as the theoretical framework of the study. Using an interpretive model will involve more than just understanding one phenomenon. The interpretive approach is grounded in the researcher's own interpretation and understanding of the “interactions and social meaning that people assign to their interactions” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 27). According to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), interpretive research focuses on understanding; in this case the change processes in “context-specific meanings, rather than seeking generalized meaning abstracted from particular context” (p. 23). Hughes (2007, p. 36) argues that the interpretivist researcher's work is not only to understand socially constructed behaviour but to represent the interpretations as shared meaning, where the processes are not simply observed. As suggested by the adjective, the

interpretive researcher interprets the social context being studied via voices of the participants through some form of language, which cannot be merely observed. In addition, Hughes (2007) mentioned that such research is more than just watching and there exists the language that constructs the social world of understanding the context.

An advantage of using interpretive research is the flexibility that its design brings, due to the nature of the “field realities, stemming from participants’ agency” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 71). In interpretive research, the researcher does not have control over the events that occur and is self-motivated to understand the phenomena under investigation. Therefore, as Delanty (2005) stated, the interpreter’s way of understanding social context, either deliberately or not with preconceptions, shapes the meaning to question the neutrality of the hermeneutics. The limitation of the interpretivist approach is that the study cannot be simply replicated to another context, as it cannot guarantee the same data, since both researcher and participant are viewed as “embodied” into the research context, together with and the process of generating data (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 95). To improve and strengthen the evaluation of an interpretive approach, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) bring in the three criteria of evaluating interpretive research: a) reflexivity, b) methods of data analysis, and c) using ‘member-checking’ (p. 100).

In the sense of this research, the pragmatic and interpretive theoretical framework is more than using observation as a method. In this case other methods are involved such as interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis to add to discussions, which will then reflect upon what is being done during the observed period. I have also used the non-participant observation technique to facilitate observation of the participants at their settings, to let the participants work as naturally as they can, without the observer influencing their behaviour. The ongoing discussion and member-checking along the time of data collection and analysis, has added strength to the interpretations that I provide in this study. In addition, by linking pragmatism to my theoretical orientation of an interpretive approach throughout the study, it has allowed me to be flexible in several important areas: a) the research design influencing the selection of the samples from the teachers, children and schools, b) the delivery of the questionnaire and c) the analytical strategy which took practical consequences into consideration. By being pragmatic, I did not hold on to the initial plan when faced with issues that might

have disrupted the research data collection process; thereby ensuring the needs and objectives of the study would be achieved. These issues will be presented and explained further in Section 4.6, Section 4.8.2, Section 4.10.2, Section 4.10.3, and Section 4.14 of this study.

#### **4.5. Positionality and perspective**

My acknowledgement of my own positionality and perspective is important in the way the study is designed, planned, analysed and interpreted. The context of this study is Brunei Darussalam and in preschool education settings. I am a Muslim with Bruneian nationality, born and raised in Brunei, who understands the Bruneian culture and values, and is able to speak Malay and English. My academic background of a BA degree in Primary Education from Universiti Brunei Darussalam in 2002-2006 has provided me with teaching practice experiences in the Brunei government primary school context (before SPN21). I also had preschool teaching experience through my tutor placement in 2007, which is also before the SPN21. I then took study leave from my tutor work and pursued an MSc (Econ) in Early Childhood Education from Swansea University in Wales, in September 2007-2008. I was given the opportunity to observe and later volunteer as a teaching assistant for my professional practice in one multi-racial primary school in Swansea. I was also given the opportunity to visit and observe Sweden's and Norway's early years' services, as part of a module requirement on the international perspectives of play. I was fortunate enough to look into the forest schools and areas of risky play that are part of the Nordic culture of learning in natural environments. In 2009 and currently, my professional background, as a lecturer in early childhood education at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, has provided me with access to schools as a Clinical Specialist, via my students' professional practice placement in government preschools. In 2010, I was involved with the UNESCO Task Force Project 5: *Education for All in Reaching the Unreached*, which provided me with first-hand experience and observation of how early childhood education services are provided in the poverty-stricken areas of Surabaya, Indonesia. I am also actively involved in collaborative work with the Ministry of Education, via the Curriculum Development Department and the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit, in monitoring the quality and progress of the early childhood education in Brunei. I also have the opportunity to observe and be a parent volunteer in two different settings of early years' provision in Sheffield, while in my second and third year of my PhD programme. This experience offered me the

knowledge, understanding and experience of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum that is providing learning through play activities for children under five years old. These background experiences have helped shape my understanding of the different ways that the various countries that I have observed are different in their ways of providing early childhood education services, from policy to practice implementation.

My positionality, as explained here, is not meant for boasting or arrogance, as I believe there is still much more for me to learn. The justification for my positionality is considered as significant background explanations for the way the research design and methodology are ‘lived processes’ with issues of evolving ethics presented later in the implementation of the data collection. The way the participants responded in this study may have been affected or impacted due to my professional positionality, especially within a small population in Brunei and the small number of schools. I acknowledge that I am also responsible for part of the change processes in Brunei Preschool Education. Hence, the interpretive researcher’s role in building “contextually grounded knowledge” enhances the importance of positionality in the methodology (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 67). Moss (2016) provided the argument that positionality does matter, as it positions and structures the research design, process and interpretations provided by the researcher.

The next part of this section looks into the samples used in this study, the methods used, the stages of the data collection, the analytical approach, and the ethical considerations.

#### **4.6. Sampling**

The participants in this study are teachers, children and senior Ministry of Education officers. The participants involved in this study were 123 preschool teachers (119 female and 4 male) out of the targeted 256 government preschool teachers included in the questionnaire component of the study. Teachers from across all four districts in Brunei were included. This sample is used as an overview of the teachers’ perceptions on change in Brunei preschools.

Then, four preschool teachers from the questionnaire sample, one each from four different schools, were purposely selected, based on the criteria of having taught preschools for more than four years and having experienced the teaching time for

preschool, both before and during the implementation of the SPN21 initiative. These four teachers were also chosen based on their questionnaire response that they were willing to contribute to the research further. The locations of the schools, for the researcher's convenience in collecting data, was also a consideration. Table 4.1 below provides the demographic information of the four teachers; all four selected teachers were based in the Brunei-Muara district. The setting of the school building type was initially thought to make a difference, if the teachers in the bungalow share their classrooms and 'rotate' classes, but once I checked the way the building was used, no difference was apparent. The bungalow, as the specialised early childhood building in School A, was still functioning and organised as one secluded classroom like the rest of the settings in Schools B, C, and D. The fact that there are different types of Pra buildings in schools is because in Brunei, there is no standardised structure defining how the government preschools were built. The latest design, if it is a new primary school, will have the Pra classes in a specialised early childhood bungalow building. These four teachers were observed and interviewed to provide deeper insights into their experiences of change processes in Brunei preschools.

**Table 4.1. Four teachers' demographic information**

No.	Teacher's name/ School	Age	G	YT	T/UT	C	SEN C	VTA	Q	Building type
1	Anita (School A)	29	F	6	U	13	1	1	BA Primary Education	Bungalow specialised early childhood building
2	Hana (School B)	54	F	16	U	17	0	1	Teacher Certificate	One classroom in the same building with other primary levels
3	Laila (School C)	45	F	9	T	25	0	1	B.Ed. in Early Childhood Education	One classroom in the same building with other primary levels
4	Tina (School D)	39	F	10	T	22	1	1	B.Ed. in Early Childhood Education	One classroom in the same building with other primary levels

\*G= Gender, YT= No. of years teaching Pra, C= No. of children in class, T/UT= Trained or untrained teacher, SENA C= No. of special needs assistance children in the class, VTA= No. of temporary volunteer teacher assistance.

From the four chosen schools, the selected four teachers helped in choosing two children each from their class, making a total of eight preschool children (6 boys and 2 girls) as the sample for the children’s observation and interviews, as illustrated in Table 4.2 below. Initially, I asked the four teachers in this study to choose the children to be interviewed by selecting the ones they thought would be good candidates for the research. The children were selected by the teachers using the criterion of the student being confident in communicating her or his thoughts, without being particular to gender. However, as research discussions were conducted, it was found that there were other children who were more expressive and who volunteered to join in. These children were later added to the study after receiving consent from their parents, as a few of the initially chosen children did not have permission from their parents to participate in the research. The selection of the children was based on teachers’ recommendations, parents’ consent, as well as each child’s consent and participation, in order to provide a more flexible and pragmatic approach with the children. This study does not aim to identify any difference(s) between male and female respondents. By having the children in this study, it has helped to provide added knowledge stemming from their perceptions as to how they view their learning experiences.

**Table 4.2. Children’s demographic information**

No.	Name	Age	Gender	School
1	Minor	6	Boy	School A
2	Arif	6	Boy	School A
3	Qilah	6	Girl	School B
4	Afendi	5	Boy	School B
5	Azim	5	Boy	School C
6	Iqbal	5	Boy	School C
7	Melina	6	Girl	School D
8	Saiful	5	Boy	School D

Two female senior officers who have direct influence on policy making, one from the Curriculum Development Department and one from the ECCE Unit, both under the Ministry of Education, Brunei, were also part of the study sample. They were added to the study in order to provide the views of the policy makers on teachers and children, in monitoring the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools.

#### 4.7. Methods of data collection

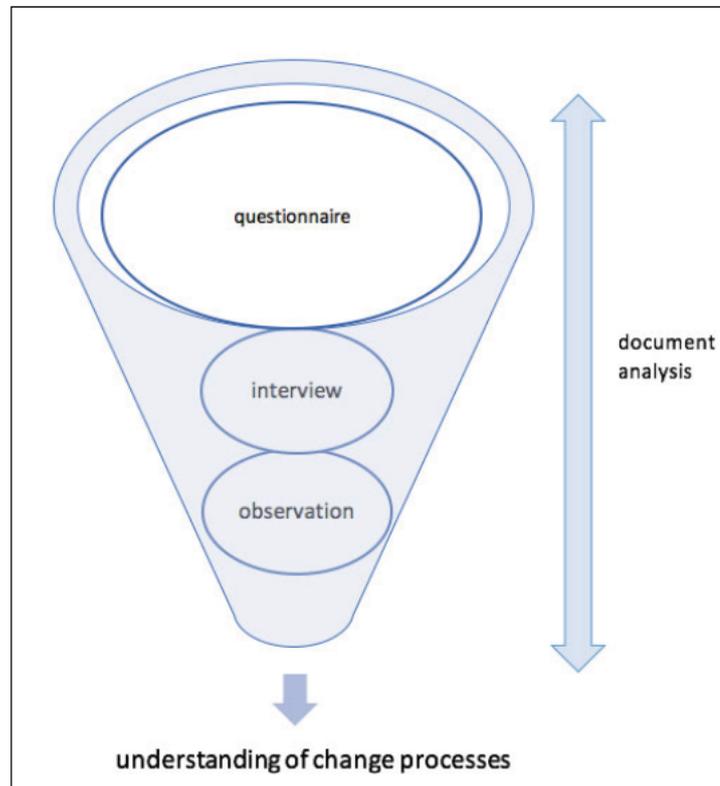
Methods refer to the way the data are gathered for the study (Bailey, 2007). As this study is using the interpretivist paradigm, methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis were used pragmatically. The research methods adopted to collect the data for this study are shown below in Table 4.3; along with the instruments and samples that will be used to address each research question.

**Table 4.3. Research questions, instruments and sample overview**

Research Questions	Instruments	Sample
1. What are the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool education system?	Document analysis	Curriculum documents, policy documents and Brunei Vision 2035 documents on education
2. In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?	Questionnaire, research discussion and observation	123 government preschool teachers (questionnaire) 4 settings and 4 preschool teachers (observation and interviews)
3. How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, in organising the environment, and in implementing the curriculum?	Observation, research discussion and document analysis	4 settings and 4 preschool teachers (observation, interviews, and document analysis)
4. How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?	Observation, research discussion, and drawings	4 settings, 8 preschool children (6 boys and 2 girls) [observation and interviews]
5. What are the Ministry of Education senior officers' perspectives regarding teachers and children in monitoring the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools?	Research discussion to be carried out after all the data is collected for research questions one until four.	1 curriculum officer and 1 early childhood education officer from the Ministry of Education, Brunei (interview)

Due to the nature of the research questions presented above, I have used the research questions as my guiding questions to explore the phenomena of change processes in the Brunei preschool education. I am not looking into the phenomena guided by any hypotheses; by referring to the research questions in Table 4.3 above, most of the research questions asked are in 'how?' and 'what?' format, which makes this study

suitable for use in qualitative research (Silverman, 2011). As this research is using mixed methods, an interpretive and a grounded theory approach, the study's main concern is on exploration and theory generation in understanding the phenomenon of change in teaching in Brunei Pra. Through this orientation, research question 2 helped to gather data via an open-ended questionnaire (method) and the qualitative data gathered from the questionnaire (content). It is important to note that although this study has minor components of quantitative data extracted from the use of the open-ended questionnaire, the research design is driven by the qualitative research paradigm. This orientation can be seen in Section 5.3 with the findings of the questionnaire section. Figure 4.3 below shows the research methods used, viewed in this study in a funnel-like overview. The overview progresses as follows: i) the questionnaire brings in the general perspective of teachers in Brunei with the change processes in teaching and learning Pra, then ii) focuses further through interview and observations to further understand the phenomena in how the teachers and children are experiencing the changes, along with iii) the senior officers' perspectives and iv) the use of document analysis throughout the research process. This interpretative study uses qualitative research methods; specifically an open-ended questionnaire, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. With all the methods used to generate data for this study, the research aimed to provide a meaningful insight into how policy is enacted in practice, by looking at all levels from policy, teachers', children's and the policy makers' perspectives in implementing the changes.



**Figure 4.3. Research methods used in this study**

#### **4.8. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire designed for this study is based on a mixed method questionnaire. It is a design of intramethod mixing (Johnson, 2015, p. 688), involving the combination of close-ended and open-ended questions. Applying the intramethod mixing of the questionnaire design helps to provide me with a brief overview of what the quantitative data, generated from the close-ended items coming from the explanations given by the teachers, means by retrieving data from the open-ended items. Wilson and Sapsford (2008) highlighted that the use of open-ended items in the questionnaire is for the respondents to be able to share their beliefs and opinions without facing restrictive pre-determined kinds of close-ended questions prepared by the researcher. This investigative technique is also part of my way of how I understand knowledge; by looking at it as natural, as it can be in different forms that can make up an in-depth understanding. I also do not believe in only using statistics to provide me with an overview of the phenomena. I therefore required another approach, that of adding the components of more open-ended items, to investigate the teachers' way of thinking. I also acknowledge that with the intramethod mixing of the questionnaire design, I was

likely to end up with large amounts of data to be analysed; a process that would take time due to the open-ended items and the total of 123 respondents. The questionnaire was used to answer research question 2: “In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?”

#### *4.8.1. The questionnaire*

There are 21 items that make up the design of the questionnaire used in this study. The items are self-designed, informed by the literature around the context of educational change processes and teachers’ beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards changes in teaching practice. Items 1 to 10 cover the demographic data of the teachers’ information, while items 11 to 21 are more focused on the teachers’ perceptions regarding the changes in teaching Pra in Brunei. Details of the questionnaire can be referred to in Appendix 2. By referring to Appendix 2, the explanation regarding the purpose of each questionnaire item, as stated below, becomes apparent.

Items 1, 2 and 3, asked for the teacher to provide their name, contact number and email address respectively. This information enables researcher-teacher contact and identifies the teachers for items 19 and 20, which asked if the teachers would like to share their experiences with the changes in teaching Pra; if ‘yes’, which means is preferred from the given choices of: a) group discussion, b) individual face to face interview, c) interview by phone, and d) by answering a set of questions by email.

Items 4 and 5, asked for each teacher’s age and gender to provide me with the background information to be able to provide the age range and gender of my participants. Item 6 required teachers to provide information about their highest academic qualification to give me the knowledge of the range of qualifications of the teachers. This information also serves to identify whether the teachers are trained or untrained early childhood teachers.

Items 7, 8 and 9 asked the teachers to state the name of school where they are working, their total number of years teaching at the preschool level and the total number of overall teaching years’ experience, if they had been teaching before Pra, regardless of the class level. All the information from items 7, 8 and 9 served to provide me with the knowledge of which district and school zones the teachers are from. These data were

used to categorise and put together the locations within the Brunei-Muara district, of those teachers who were chosen for the classroom observation and interview follow up. The number of years in teaching preschool will indicate whether the teacher is a relatively inexperienced or experienced Pra teacher. The total number of teaching years reflects whether the teacher has only been teaching Pra level or has experience of teaching other levels, as well, within the Primary school. Item 10 asked the teachers for the number of children in their Pra class. These data provided an understanding of the average number of children in the Brunei Pra classes.

Item 11 consists of 17 statements that need the teachers to rate their perceptions of the statements based on a four-point Likert scale of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. The statements were designed to reveal the teachers' awareness of the changes introduced, as well as the confidence and beliefs levels of the teachers in reflecting the change phenomena as they experienced it. The 17 statements are listed below:

- 1) I am confident in teaching Pra
- 2) I understand the Pra syllabus
- 3) I understand the requirements of SPN21 for Pra
- 4) I am aware of my role as a Pra teacher
- 5) I am able to work collaboratively with other Pra teachers
- 6) I know my own strengths and areas requiring growth (able to do self-reflection) in my teaching and learning for Pra
- 7) I am seeking out information from other sources about the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra to understand it better
- 8) I am prepared to apply and adapt the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra
- 9) I am making deliberate efforts to coordinate with other Pra teachers using the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra
- 10) I know how to set up learning corners in my Pra class
- 11) I know how to apply the project approach in my teaching and learning
- 12) I know how to use the mind map for my lesson plan
- 13) I know how to involve parents in Pra activities
- 14) I know how to plan and prepare the end of term showcase for Pra
- 15) I know how to apply learning through play in my Pra activities

16) I know how to get materials for teaching and learning Pra

17) Teachers are agents of change in children's learning

Item 12 in the questionnaire is a close-ended question which asked the teachers to state if they are experiencing the changes in teaching Pra. The purpose of this item is to confirm whether the teachers are going through changes in teaching Pra. If the answer is 'no', the participant can skip item 13 and answer item 14.

Item 13 is an open-ended item which asked the teachers to state the three main changes that they experience in teaching Pra in their classrooms. This item also serves to confirm and to discover the knowledge of the top three changes that the teachers are experiencing.

Item 14 is a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. First, it asks the teachers to state if change is necessary by answering either 'yes' or 'no'. Secondly, the teachers are to provide their reasoning for the answer to help me understand their thinking towards change.

Item 15 asked the teachers the ways that they are managing change in their classrooms and is an open-ended item. This serves the purpose of gaining more understanding about the ways teachers are managing the changes within their classrooms.

Item 16 is a close-ended question that asked the teachers if they have support in managing change. This served to provide the number of teachers who received support in managing change. Item 17 is an open-ended question that asked teachers to state the kinds of support they received in managing the changes in teaching and learning Pra. The data provided helps to identify the types of support the teachers received in managing the changes.

Item 18 asked the teachers to tick the training that they have attended from a given list of training identified in the document, such as: a) phonics for Pra, b) introduction to Pra teaching, c) learning through play, d) using a project approach, e) mind mapping, f) involving parents in Pra activities, and g) managing school visits for Pra children. The teachers are also asked to state if there are other training courses they have attended, or

know of, and to specify them. The purpose of item 18 is to provide data on teacher training and their background knowledge in implementing the changes in teaching Pra.

Items 19 and 20 are as explained earlier in the beginning of this section. Item 21 asked the teachers for their comments and suggestions regarding the changes for the teaching and learning of Pra. The comments and suggestions serve to provide a further understanding of their perception towards the changes in teaching Pra.

#### *4.8.2. Questionnaire distribution and consent*

Upon gaining consent to conduct research from the University of Sheffield and the Ministry of Education, Brunei, the questionnaire was initially distributed by email to all Pra teachers in Brunei government schools from November 2013 until January 2014. The email was thought to be a cheaper way to collect data, as at that time I was based in Sheffield for my doctoral studies, and the participants were all based in Brunei. The response rate was only one out of the 256 targeted Pra teachers.

I then had a talk with the ECCE Unit to find out possibilities of distributing the questionnaire as hardcopies via school circulation. Initially I thought of giving their responses back in a sealed envelope provided individually. The ECCE Unit suggested and offered an opportunity that they will be conducting a CPD training session for all the Pra teachers across the districts and slotted forty-five minutes for me to distribute the questionnaire before the start of the CPD. The date of the CPD training coincided with my trip back to Brunei that was scheduled for data collection in March 2014 and so I took the opportunity. A memo was circulated by the ECCE Unit regarding the date of the CPD training. The teachers in each district were grouped and asked to meet in one identified school hall for the CPD training, according to their districts, as arranged by the ECCE Unit.

There were four trips that I needed to make on four different dates, one for every district. Before the CPD training began, I was given the forty-five minute slot. At the beginning of the session I explained my presence and the research intentions. I distributed the questionnaires myself, giving the teachers time to answer within the time available. The teachers were asked to submit their responses before they started the CPD. I collected the answered questionnaires on-site to maintain their confidentiality.

I assured the teachers on the issue of complete confidentiality and anonymity when writing up the report. About twenty teachers were asking me for assurance of their responses to remain as confidential and there were questions raised that I was not expecting when I designed the questionnaire; in particular, my positionality being questioned, as most of the Pra teachers were familiar to my work position. Although the information sheet attached to the questionnaire had already stated the confidentiality and anonymity of the responses in writing, my verbal assurances were also necessary. These assurances were given repeatedly as the issues of my positionality and the assurance of anonymity were again raised in every district. The teachers were asking for confirmation that the responses will not be read by any of the ECCE Unit officers and whether I was conducting the research on behalf of the ECCE Unit or the Ministry of Education. I acknowledged that this research was sensitive at the time of the changes being implemented and this goes back to my positionality, as explained earlier in this chapter. I reassured the teachers and explained to them my positionality at that time, of coming in with the questionnaires, not as a lecturer for UBD, but as a doctoral researcher from a UK university. The teachers were informed that I was on-leave and doing an in-service study scheme, and not doing any collaborative work with the Ministry of Education. I explained that my study is based on my own curiosity on how I have observed Pra classes before this; I had not observed any, or been involved with any, of the changes introduced as I had left to pursue my studies in the UK. I also explained to them my positionality as a doctoral candidate researcher and in its simplest form as a student researcher. I informed them verbally that I acknowledged the presence of the ECCE Unit officers in the room, but they are not entitled to read the answered questionnaire in its raw format; only myself as the researcher could access this confidential information. The ECCE Unit officers at that time were present as they were filing the attendance of the teachers before they came into the hall and during my questionnaire distribution. The ECCE Unit officers provided the space and time for me to carry out the questionnaire, while they were busy checking on their training materials at the back of the room and nowhere close to the teachers. Equally I can confirm the officers never went around to check the responses, as I had discussed the issue of data confidentiality with them prior to the questionnaire distribution. The total response rate for the questionnaire was in total was 123 out of the targeted 256.

Although I have adopted the open-ended questionnaire distributed to the teachers across the districts, this study is not showing how every teacher in Brunei is responding to the required changes. The open-ended questionnaire helps in providing an overview of where the teachers in Brunei are with the change processes; in fusion, tension or facing difficulty with the required changes in the preschool curriculum. So, the motivation for the research is to understand the change processes of how the 123 preschool teachers are responding to the changes, with a further insight on four teachers' perspectives. The research is also motivated in bringing in the perspectives of the eight children and the two senior officers to provide further understanding to the change processes.

#### **4.9. Classroom observations**

In this section I describe classroom observation, which is another method that I used in this study, as well as the ways way the observations were carried out. Classroom observations usually include recording and jotted notes about classroom events, followed by interviews with the teachers and the students to build understanding of interpretations of events that occurred in the classroom (Wragg, 1999). Qualitative observation is used and the observer is free to note the natural setting with categories that provide meaning for the phenomena observed, without the need of having predetermined categories of measures (Adler and Adler, 1998, p. 81). MacDonald (2015, p. 341) stated that naturalistic observation helps to inform us about how children are learning, what they are learning, and what they would like to know. Taking time to observe children in their natural learning setting strengthens and develops understanding of the teaching and learning cycle. Observing children's learning can be carried out: a) by naturalistic observation, with the use of running records or anecdotal records; b) in recorded conversations with the children either individually or as a small group; and c) through photo elicitation to bring them back to seek their comments and thinking. MacDonald (2015, p. 341) highlighted the benefits of providing naturalistic observation to help take time to check in on the children's learning process, to find out what they know, their thinking and how they are learning. Observation also provides the vehicle to understand the children's, and our community's identities.

Field notes are also used and are helpful for interpretive researchers to record the process under investigation, as they have interpreted it in that particular context. An advantage of using field notes is to inform how the researcher is transparent and

trustworthy in conducting and implementing the research process. The field notes, when combined with the recalling of events and other types of evidence, such as observation logs, research diaries and memos, can all help the researcher to make sense of the data.

The objective of observing the teachers is to answer research question two: “In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?” and research question three: “How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, in organising the environment, and in implementing the curriculum?”. Meanwhile, the reason for observing children in their classroom is to answer research question four: “How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?”.

#### *4.9.1. Gathering data from classroom observation of the teachers’*

Upon gaining consent to observe classes in action, by using the open observation approach to classroom observation meant that I used a blank sheet of paper to record the lesson. Before each observation was conducted, I explained to the teacher that the objective of the observation was to look into her teaching practice generally, in order to help me understand how the changes have been translated into her understanding of implementing practice. Then we agreed on the dates where I could come in and observe. After the observation, we sat down and discussed the session. During the observation, I noted down key points about the lesson, and also recorded observations such as the teaching styles used, adult and child/children interactions, types of activities, children’s reactions, and the use of classroom resources and space.

The uniqueness of each classroom setting implied that the 'translation' of the policy into practice, via schemes of work and lesson plans, might give me a more accurate understanding of ‘translations’ of the preschool curriculum into practice. Therefore, I did not rely on what the teachers told me they do, but I am witnessing first-hand what they are actually doing in their classrooms. The idea is that the changes introduced should feed each teacher’s development programme, through which he/she is progressively increasing his/her understanding of his/her work and hence bettering his/her teaching (Hopkins, 2002).

To summarise the implications of the change processes currently affecting Brunei preschool education, the processes are reflected in how they are translated into classrooms. In agreement with Hopkins (2002), research done on teachers' practice is inextricably linked to curriculum change and the adoption of new teaching strategies. The importance of looking into the 'translation' of curriculum change is to encourage a discourse among researchers, teachers, and policymakers; with the purpose of both improving practice and avoiding any devaluation in the quality of the implementation process.

Classroom research has the advantage of being able to identify the major processes involved in implementing change. Such research helps to identify what changes have occurred in the classroom, providing a clearer insight into the kaleidoscope of modification and novelty. The metaphor of a kaleidoscope in this sense means, in particular: i) the kaleidoscope of activities that I am seeing, ii) the extent to which these 'mirror' the ECE policy in Brunei, and iii) the influence of teachers' beliefs. The kaleidoscope metaphor here is also used when I am looking into the system, bringing my own values, beliefs and experiences, which now meld local Brunei and more global perspectives as a result of my studying in a Western context. Observation is never neutral or impartial, as it is always influenced by how one looks at it; in other words, the subjective perceptual process. Questioning myself, about such issues as 'what identified strategies have the teachers used?', or 'what is happening in the classroom?' have guided the observations.

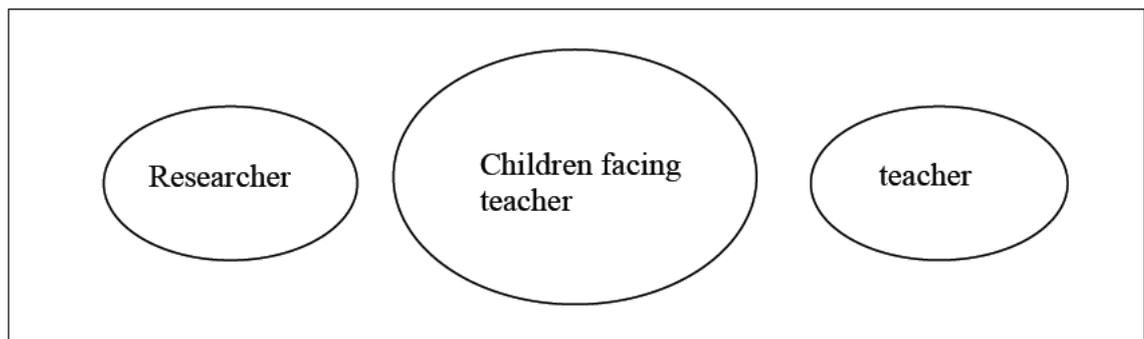
#### *4.9.2. Observation tool*

The observation log, as shown in Table 4.4 below, was used to record events against time; using a narrative approach in the form of comments. This log represents the field notes taken during the observations, where events were recorded every 15 minutes. Although observations were taken throughout, the record against time is to highlight what has happened for the ease of reference. It was challenging being a lone researcher, obliged to undertake intensive periods of observation and recording. Hence, audio recordings and photographs were also employed to help support the field notes and act as an *aide-memoire*.

**Table 4.4. Observation log**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Comments</b>

When I went into the classroom for the first time, I introduced myself to the children as a researcher who wanted to see and learn what activities they were doing in school. I asked for their consent verbally, if they were ‘ok’ with me sitting at the back and watching what they did or were going to do. I told them I was doing some work as well to explain what activities they were involved with in school. When it was observation time, I sat at the back of the classroom where I could observe the lesson as naturally and as unobtrusively as possible (see Figure 4.4 below).



**Figure 4.4. The researcher's position in the classroom for observation**

At the beginning of the observation period, one or two children would look my way to see what I was doing, especially if I was writing some notes while observing. After a few sessions, the children asked me if I knew already what activities they did or were doing. Some were even happy to explain the activities that they had done, either as a group or individually. The children were supportive and provided me with some insights by allowing me to witness their reactions towards the activities planned by the teacher.

#### *4.9.3. Some of the codes used to record the events*

Below are listed some of the codes used to record the events:

- 1) Free choice activity (FC) - mentions children choosing their own activities
- 2) Seating arrangement (SA) - mentions the seating arrangements of the children

- 3) Individual seating arrangement/at desk (ISA) - mentions children seated at their own chairs and desks
- 4) Group seating arrangement at table (GSAT) - mentions children sitting as a group at their tables
- 5) Group seating arrangement at mat (GSAM) - mentions children sitting as a group at the mat
- 6) Free access to resources (FA) - mentions children are free to use any of the materials from any learning resources in the classroom
- 7) Restricted access (RS) - mentions children being restricted to use only some or none of the resources in the classroom.
- 8) Whole group activity (WGA) - mentions any lesson or activities done as a whole group
- 9) Teacher-directed activity (TDA) - mentions activities directed by teacher
- 10) Routine (R) - mentions of any of the children's routines, such as reading the prayer before the start of the lesson, prayer before eating for break time and prayer to mark the end of the day's session.
- 11) Teacher Anita - (TA) - mentions Teacher Anita
- 12) Teacher Hana- (TH) - mentions Teacher Hana
- 13) Teacher Laila- (TL) - mentions Teacher Laila
- 14) Teacher Tina- (TT) - mentions Teacher Tina

#### **4.10. Interviews**

This section, explains another method that I used for this study. It begins with the definition and the types of interviews and the justification of using this information gathering method. How I carried out the interviews with the teachers, the children and the senior officers is also explained.

Hammond and Wellington (2013, p. 91) described interviews as 'research discussions between the researcher and the participants in the study.' Unstructured, structured and semi-structured interviews are the three interview types, as stated by Bailey (2007); the definitions of which are explained:

- a) *Unstructured interviews* are also known as informal interviews, being similar to conversations with little standardisation and with a free range to converse on the given topic.

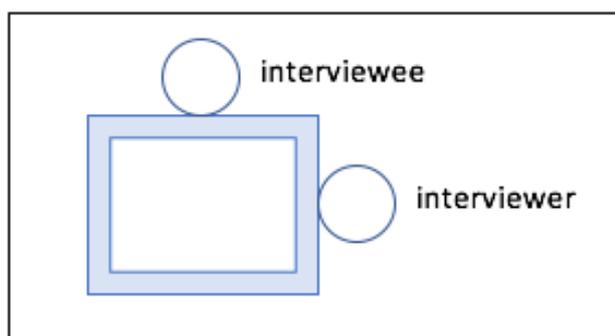
- b) *Structured interviews* incorporate a set of prepared questions and those questions are asked in a designated order.
- c) *Semi-structured interviews* provide flexibility whereby the interviewer has a set of questions as a guide, but are not necessarily used in a pre-set order. Such interviews often take the form of a discussion between the interviewer and interviewee and are most often used in the interpretive research paradigm.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gather the interviewees' detailed perceptions by using the semi-structured questions as probes to help elicit the interviewees' thoughts and opinions. The semi-structured interview model is also used because it helps to tone down the researcher's 'power' in positionality. The interviewees should feel comfortable and willing to discuss their thoughts spontaneously and without fear of any negative outcomes (Wiersma, 2000). Using semi-structured interviews helps to elicit the participants' explanations regarding the observed data collected; giving voice to the observations from the participants' perspectives. I personally like to use the term 'discussion' in preference to 'interview', as the former term helps to 'relax' the data collection setting during the interview, by making it look more like 'informal conversations' are happening, even though those conversations are guided by semi-structured interview questions. Making the research situation seem 'less formal' allows the participants to provide their opinions easily. At the same time the ethics of interviewing are adhered to; prior consent from the participants to be interviewed was always gained, as was obtaining permission to use my mobile phone to record the conversations. Confidentiality and anonymity are also ensured and the participants are always reassured on this matter. When I used the term 'interview', my participants in the pilot study became noticeably tense. Hence, the term 'research discussions' in this report refers to the interview process. In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers, eight children and two senior officers.

#### *4.10.1. Interviews with teachers*

The interviews were done with the teachers, both before and after their lessons, to find out their perceptions on the change processes in teaching Pra. The teachers' perceptions were used to validate the classroom observations to provide sense to the interpretation of the observed classroom activities. Interviews with the teachers were used to answer

research question two: “In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?” and research question three: “How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, organising the environment, and implementing the curriculum?”. Appendix 6 contains the semi-structured interview questions used for the teachers after their lesson implementation. Interviews conducted before the lessons were basically focused on clarifying the lesson plan, if needed. The interviews with the teachers were conducted in a different room in the teacher’s school; a location chosen by the interviewee. Once the selection of an empty classroom or a quiet meeting room had been made, only the researcher and interviewee were involved in the information gathering. The door was kept closed to suit each teacher’s own preference and comfort. The seating arrangement during the interview is as illustrated in Figure 4.5 below. The seating arrangement was deliberately done to make the research discussion as informal as possible. The interviews were all conducted in the interviewees’ chosen preferred language: Malay.



**Figure 4.5. Seating arrangement during interview**

#### *4.10.2. Interviews with the children*

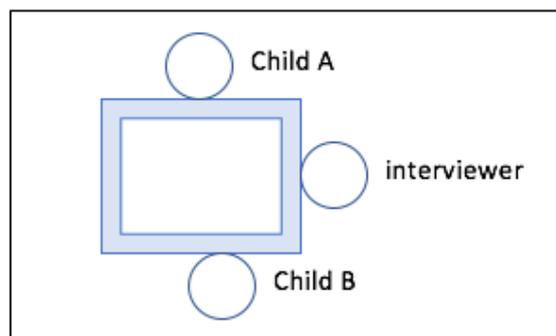
Interviews with the children were conducted to elicit their opinions on what their learning setting is like. This set-up was designed to gather the children’s views on their teachers’ ways of organising the classroom and implementing the teaching activities. This situation also provided information to check my interpretation of the reactions of the children, as noted during the classroom observation sessions.

Observation, discussion and drawings were the tools used to gather the data from the eight preschool children. The aim of the research discussion with the children was to

find out their teaching and learning experiences in the preschool classes at this time of significant curriculum reform. The research discussion was also used to support the observation findings, to see how children are learning in class by taking into account their experiences.

The children's semi-structured interview schedule, which was used for guidance during the research discussions, is presented in Appendix 7. When interviewing the children, I gave them the option to draw their perceptions of their learning in the classroom, if they wished to do so. Clark (2005) mentioned the use of drawings by children as a medium to express and elicit their experiences and perceptions. Haney, Russeo and Bebell (2004) further emphasised that by involving children and asking them about their opinions, the use of drawing can help facilitate their attention to the discussion in their own ways. Using drawing as a representation of the children's thoughts about their learning environment, aids the children in making sense of their thinking by using visuals in the form of their own drawings. Another purpose of using the drawing option, during the research discussion, is to enable the interview session to flow in a natural way by doing activities and discussing the topic at the same time. Einarsdóttir (2007, p. 201) highlighted that drawings also acts as visual information that provides understanding in the way children interpret things. Clark (2005) added that "listening to children talking about their own drawings can reveal important insights into their understandings" (p. 496). Bland (2018) highlighted that drawing can provide us with an understanding of the children's world and their views and can act as a medium to aid children's voices to express their ideas. They can document their talk either verbally or in drawings. This study provided children with opportunities to reflect on their classroom experiences by highlighting what they like about their classroom and by recognising and reflecting on their learning experiences. The children are not forced to draw and were only provided with this option if they requested or chose it. The interviews with the children were conducted for ten to fifteen minutes at the back of the classrooms when the children had finished their activities. The seating arrangements during the interviews with the children were of two types. The interviews that were conducted on a one-to-one basis follow the seating arrangement shown earlier in Figure 4.5; the arrangement for the interviews conducted in pairs is as shown in Figure 4.6 below. The seating was arranged to help make the interview situation less formal and intimidating for the children. The

interviews with the children sought to answer research question four: “How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?”



**Figure 4.6. Seating arrangement during interview with children**

#### *4.10.3. Interviews with the children in practice*

The children in this study were given the choice to explain verbally or to draw; drawing materials were available if they wished to choose the latter option. Some children find it hard to explain verbally; however, when they drew, and then we went through the explanations of the drawing, the data emerged while the drawing facilitated their talking. The methods used to obtain the data from each of the eight children varied, as the research approach is dependent on how the child is feeling on the day the discussion took place. When there are drawings that children provided, I put notes next to them to help me understand what they were drawing, after asking the children to explain their drawings. I wrote down what each drawing meant, based on the child’s explanation, so that my interpretation of their drawing would be as accurate as possible. Not all the children provided drawings because it was optional for them and the drawing was only used as a tool for facilitating the research discussion. When I asked them, some children said it was hard for them to explain so I asked them if they wanted to draw their favourite place. We then went through it together, and the answers emerged while they were drawing. The drawing also helps them to answer me, so that was why this approach was not consistent with each child in the way I get data from them; some preferred to talk but not to draw. So here, there are three things to be noted about offering choices of communication to the children: i) I gave children the choice of talking or drawing while talking, ii) some children chose to draw, and others did not and iii) children are confident with talking but for some children the drawing facilitated their talking.

There were two schools, A and C where, when I interviewed the children, they were not comfortable in a one-to-one, researcher/student situation. The main reason for their discomfort was they thought that they had done something wrong and were in trouble. They had seen me in the class and one child explained that usually, when there is a problem, the teacher sits one-to-one with the child. This indirectly, also provided me with the understanding of the classroom culture, where one-to-one sessions are the way the teacher manages the children's behaviour. So, based on the condition at that particular time, when a child felt they wanted another friend to come along and join the discussion, that is what happened. This case is an example of me being responsive to the children's feelings. I responded to the child by allowing other children to join in and responded to what the child was comfortable with, to ensure the interviewee child was comfortable with the discussion. By having interviewed children in four different schools, without having a standardised interview model, as presented in Table 4.5, two interview models developed. The interviews in Schools A and C were conducted in student pairs, whilst in Schools B and D the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. All interview settings were located at the back of the classroom. The reasons why I interviewed some children on their own, and some in pairs, were because I wanted to be both ethically responsible and ethically responsive to the children. My responses also reflect firstly, how it was not just about me coming in as a researcher, but how the children are seeing me; and secondly, my thinking about what was comfortable for the children.

**Table 4.5 Children's interview style**

<b>School</b>	<b>Interview style:</b>	<b>Interview setting</b>
School A	Pairs	Within the same classroom, at the back of the room
School B	One to one	Within the same classroom, at the back of the room
School C	Pairs	Within the same classroom, at the back of the room
School D	One to one	Within the same classroom, at the back of the room

In School C, there was also a time when a child was talking about the reading corner as his favourite place in the class, so he went to show me his favourite book. Other children were then also interested to show me their favourite books and were telling me that the reading corner is their favourite place in the class. The result was a small crowd of children, which I let remain, as my main focus was the chosen interviewee child; so I

just let the rest join in. The children were eager and actually queued up to share their book preference with me. I didn't record the responses of the rest of the children, as the focus was on the chosen child. Again, it was my attention they were asking for, as it can seem unfair that only one child (the interviewee) was having all my attention. There were three additional drawings that were given to me from children who were not part of this study; drawings which I could not include as their creators had not received parental consent to take part in the research. This group behaviour and spontaneity in turn signified that the children were comfortable with me, and were interested in what I was doing in their setting. Such behaviour also showed that I was being accepted as a trusted adult in School C. Although I did not keep the drawings, as I did not have permission and they were not part of my data collection, they served to indicate that the children had a satisfactory level of trust in me, are interested in the work I was doing and that I was accepted in the setting of School C. The children's behaviour also indicated my values in practice regarding how I responded to the children and their space, my research methods, and ethics, as seen by how the children responded when I was in their space. The examples presented above were some of the ways I ensured responsible ethical research practice.

#### *4.10.4. Interviews with senior officers*

Finally, interviews with the policy level senior officers from the Ministry of Education were also carried out to obtain their insights and their perceptions into how they monitor and support the progress of changes that have been identified in my study. The same seating arrangement, as shown earlier in Figure 4.6, was used. The interviews with senior officers took place in order to answer research question five: "What are the Ministry of Education officers' perspectives on teachers and children in terms of provision in policing the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools?"

The language used across all interviews in this study was in the participants' preferred language, which is Malay.

#### **4.11. Document analysis**

The document analysis used in this study is the Brunei SPN21 curriculum framework, as embedded in the Brunei Preschool Curriculum. The supplementary report deals with the initiatives of the ECCE Unit, which has brought in the transformation of the preschool landscape in Brunei Darussalam from 2013 was also analysed. The analysis of policy documents was mentioned earlier in Chapter 2 (from Section 2.3 to Section 2.20) in providing background information of the study. Document analysis helps to answer research question one: “What are the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool education system?”

The following sections explain the pilot study, the stages of the main data collection, the approaches adopted to implement the analytical strategy and the ethical considerations relevant to this study.

#### **4.12. Pilot study**

The pilot study was carried out in April 2013 in Brunei, over a brief duration of two weeks. The aims of the pilot study were: i) to ascertain whether the proposed methods of data collection were appropriate to obtain the information needed for the study, ii) whether the required information could be collected in the time available, and iii) to identify any problems in data collection. In other words, the pilot study also aimed to find out if there were any flaws with any questionnaire items that might have been vague, confusing, misleading or sensitive, so that improvements could be made to the unsatisfactory items prior to the actual study itself. The pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted with 13 Brunei government preschool teachers. The questionnaire items that were found to be redundant were removed before the actual study took place. The pilot revealed that the sentences used for the questionnaire items are clear and did not need much revising.

Further use of pilot observation of three preschools, involving an open running record of every 10 minutes, as well as semi-structured interviews with three Pra teachers, was required to see what the teachers do in practice. In order to test the chosen methodology, three schools were selected during my preliminary visits. The aim of the preliminary visit was to see for myself what was happening in classroom practice, as I had only read the transformations to preschool landscape and pedagogy documents. From the 3

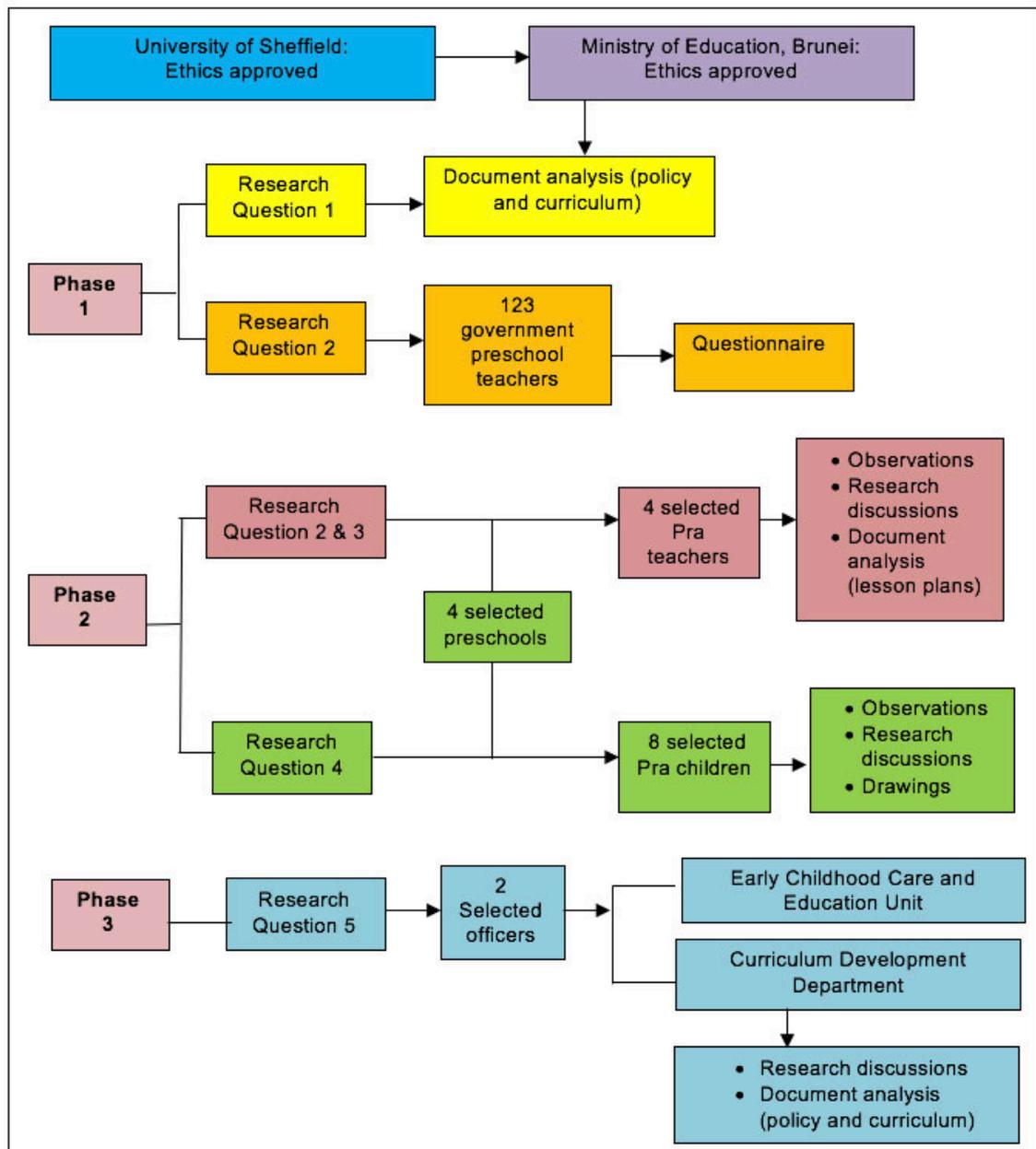
preschools visited, there were 2 trained teachers and 1 untrained teacher. The 2 trained teachers I visited were both doing a phonics' lesson. A pilot interview with a child was also carried out to see if there is anything that needed improvement.

#### **4.13. Stages of data collection: Main study**

All stages of data collection took place during the continuing policy changes of Brunei preschool education that were transforming the ECCE landscape. Figure 4.7 below shows the methodological structure of the research.

There are three phases to the data collection.

*Phase one* was the distribution of the questionnaire in March 2014. The research instrument consisted of a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions, and it was sent to all government preschool teachers in Brunei to gain insights into their views of the phenomena of changes being introduced into their practice. For phase one of the study, I wrote to the Ministry of Education requesting assistance in distributing a memo to all 256 government preschool teachers in Brunei, as well as meeting those teachers at the assigned places throughout the four districts. The memo asked the teachers to come voluntarily to the designated school to answer a questionnaire; a task which, having gained their consent, would take from between 15 - 30 minutes of their time. I explained to them, both in writing and verbally, the research objectives and the purpose of this project. The response rate of 123 preschool teachers out of the 256 who were initially targeted was a catalyst towards moving from a wider population of teachers to a smaller focus of four teachers. This reorientation would allow the researcher to understand the change processes as they happened to Brunei's preschool education; in particular a) updating or renewing the curriculum, b) rearranging of the classroom settings and c) the changes in teachers' roles.



**Figure 4.7. Methodology structure**

*Phase two* of the study was conducted between March and early June 2014. I selected four government preschools, and the four teachers in the selected preschools became involved in my project, upon having received their informed consent. Then I asked the teachers to identify two children from their classes who would be fluent in conversing with me. Since four preschools had been selected, that added up to eight children in total. I then sent an information sheet and consent forms for the parents of the selected children through the teachers help. For phase two, four classroom observations in natural settings were conducted for each of the four preschool classes. Roberts-Holmes (2005) stated that observation is a popular choice that early childhood researchers

choose to gather real natural data. Field notes were also used at various stages during the research, including the early periods of observation, when I was refining the methods of gathering data. Note-taking was also employed later, when analysing and interpreting the data. This technique helped to provide detailed recorded observations of individuals and the context(s) in which they interact. Observation of naturally occurring classroom activities also involves looking at each teacher's way of lesson/teaching implementation, and organisation of the class environment. Documentary analysis of material, including the Brunei preschool curriculum and teachers' lesson plans, was also used to gather data. A digital camera was used to take snapshots of classroom observations. The purpose of the second data collection phase was to verify the information obtained from the first phase of the questionnaire.

Next, semi-structured interviews in the form of research discussions with key stakeholders: the government officers, preschool teachers and children, were carried out in order to gather more in-depth information relating to perspectives reflected in the questionnaire data. These interviews also helped to seek clarification of issues that might be noted in the process of classroom observations. Implementing semi-structured interviews as a guide to questioning provided both the interviewee, and myself as interviewer, with some form of natural discussions about the change events that are happening in Pra. The interview sessions were conducted at each participant's convenience; with each session lasting for about thirty minutes. All the participants preferred to use the Malay, as opposed to English, language during their interviews. A digital voice recorder was used to obtain accurate answers and facilitate verbatim transcriptions; a procedure carried out by myself. All of the transcripts were in Malay and some parts that are sufficiently significant to be reported in this English language study were therefore translated into English. Research discussions with teachers focused on their views of the changes in pedagogy and how they implement, plan and organise: i) the teaching-learning environments, b) materials, c) their time d) the children and e) the adults. Discussions with children were used to elicit their learning experiences and to provide a relaxing and non-threatening environment in which to gather their opinions about their learning experiences. In addition to the discussions, children's drawings were used to elicit information about their learning experiences.

*The third phase* of this study involved the research discussion that took place with two education officers; one from the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and one from the Curriculum Development Department Unit. The discussions were conducted in September 2014 to obtain the officers' views about the preschool practice and ways of supporting the teachers and children during the expected curriculum reforms. The reason for using the term 'research discussion' instead of 'interview' was to provide a relaxed and non-threatening environment for talking about the issues of preschool practice. The use of observation and research discussions/interviews has aided a better understanding of the teachers' views on how they are managing the changes.

#### **4.14. Approach to analytical strategy**

In order to analyse the data the questionnaire was analysed, the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, and observation logs, memos and documents were reviewed. Foundations of the grounded theory were used as the analysis model for all data generated from these various research methods. When theories were formed, aspects emerged which identified certain aspects of the change processes, such as:

- Contextual support, in the form of written policies or statements;
- Underlying perspectives among teachers and children that appear to support implementation of change processes in teaching and learning (i.e. Are there shared understandings? Do the benefits of the approach need to be acknowledged by all stakeholders?);
- Approaches to planning and programming; classroom layouts.

Miles and Huberman (1994), cited in Wellington (2015), identified three stages in qualitative data analysis, as below:

- 1) data reduction: data selection and condensation where data is collated, summarized, coded and sorted into themes, clusters and categories;
- 2) data display: data organised and "displayed" to conceptualise data towards interpretation;
- 3) conclusion drawing: involves interpreting and giving meaning to data (p. 260).

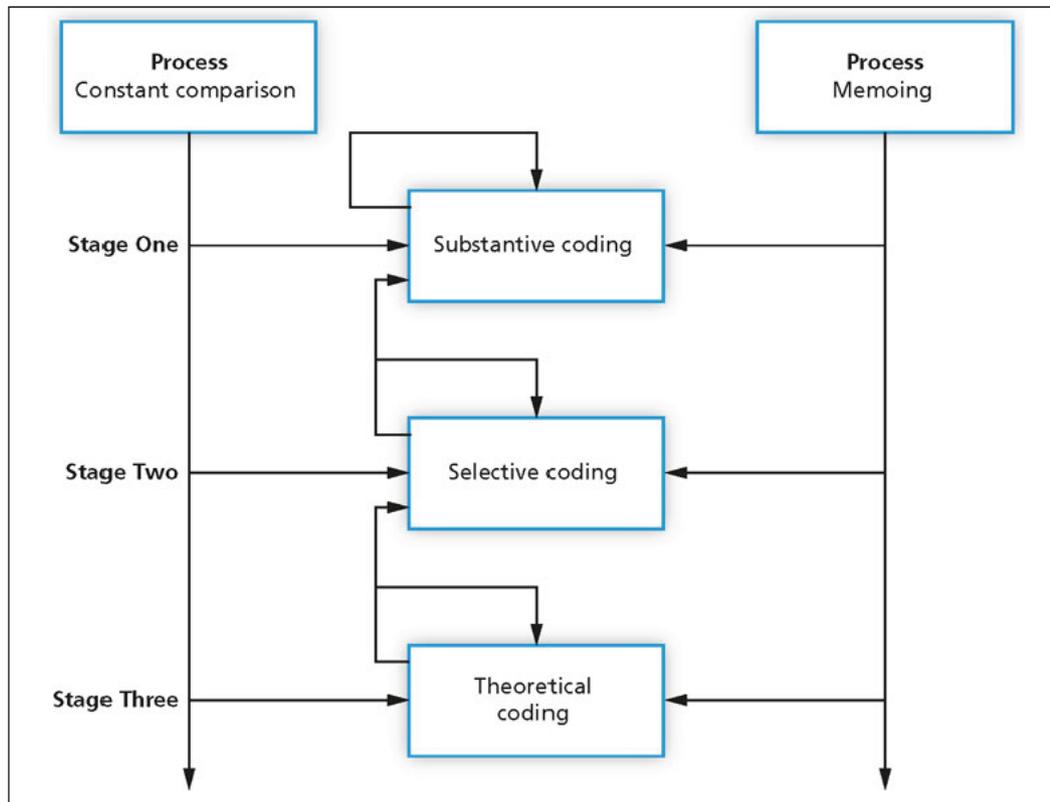
Grounded theory is based on producing a theory emerging from the data. Carey (2012) explained grounded theory whereby:

“The researcher identifies the research questions or problem then collects data (during observations, interviews, etc.) from the sample participants. Then they analyse this new information and steadily extrapolate meaning and build new concepts and theories (p. 135).”

Furthermore, grounded theory typically follows the nine stages presented below, as identified by Carey (2012):

- 1) A research question is asked or problem identified;
- 2) Theoretical sampling of participants develops;
- 3) Interviews or other methods continue to be undertaken to collect and analyse data;
- 4) Transcripts are carefully read and emerging trends or themes defined;
- 5) Collected data is coded and concepts are developed;
- 6) There is movement back and forth between the four stages identified above;
- 7) Notes will be kept of further individual ‘cases’ following interviews or observations. Analytical concepts or trends continue to emerge from new data and help to revise the categories and concepts which will help to develop the final theory;
- 8) The researcher begins to develop a conceptual scheme which leads to the emergence of a core theory;
- 9) Eventually a state of ‘saturation’ will be reached (p. 136-137).

During the analytical process, I applied Glaser and Strauss’ approach to grounded theory analysis, cited in Newby (2014, p. 493). This approach is represented in Figure 4.8 below.



**Figure 4.8. Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory analysis approach**  
 Source: Newby (2014, p. 493)

Using the approach suggested by Glaser and Strauss, I first read through all of the questionnaire findings, grouping the open-ended items thematically. After identifying a whole understanding from the questionnaire findings, I addressed the interview transcripts and observation logs several times in order to get a 'whole' picture of the data. Then I worked on the participants' data differently, according to their groups. I went through the teachers' interview data first and then information from the classroom observations. After that I analysed the interview transcripts from the four teachers and established substantive codes. These substantive codes provided the meaning of the data from the initial coding stage. I went through all the four teachers' transcripts again using the substantive codes to find emerging patterns and then recoded the data with selective codes. The selective codes then helped to pull in the substantive codes to merge into a core theme.

For the observation logs I applied the same method as I had done with the transcripts. After that, I looked into the children's interview transcripts and drawings, and later followed with the interview transcripts from the senior officers; the same process of identifying the themes practised earlier with the teachers' transcripts was applied. There

were constant comparisons along all the different sets of data, as well as the process of ‘memoing’ when coming up to the theoretical coding stage. The most challenging part of the data analysis was the final stage of generating a whole picture to facilitate an understanding of the data as an entity, in order to create a theoretical understanding of the change processes under investigation. Throughout the analytical process, there were so many times when I was engrossed with the data and re-immersed myself with the data to try to get the actual meaning of the process of change. The data were coded based on the patterns that emerged, identified by themes. There were a lot of processes involved to make me take steps into and out of the data, in order to be able to reflect critically on the narratives of the research findings. The events investigated were so familiar to me that, in order for me to come in and make meaning of the findings, I needed to think and reflect outside the data to bring in a different perspective for looking at things that were so familiar. Hence, I refer to this ‘stepping back’ from data as trying to understand the processes of change in making the familiar unfamiliar or strange, by looking at it from the various angles of policy documentation, to implementation, to practice. Patterns of similarities and differences helped to identify the theory that emerged from the data. Constant revision of coming back to the themes and sub-themes, re-addressing the findings of the methods and going back to reading the raw data, all helped me to come to an understanding of how the phenomena of change is understood in the Brunei context. This complex process took longer than I expected, due to the richness of the data taken from the various participants mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, when the issue of sampling was addressed. The way I analysed my data is similar to Wellington (2015, p. 261-263) who suggested ways of analysing qualitative data. Wellington (2015) shared his experience in analysing qualitative data and suggested the stages as follows:

- 1) Immersion: getting an overall sense of data by listening and re-reading transcripts;
- 2) Reflecting: ‘stand back’ from the data which a researcher may be close to;
- 3) Taking apart/analysing data: break data by:
  - a) Carving it up to manageable ‘units’ or chunks
  - b) Selecting or filtering out units which can be used
  - c) Categorising or coding units, i.e. beginning to create categories, patterns or recurring themes which can gradually be used to ‘make sense’ of the data

- d) Attempting to subsume subsequent units of data under these provisional categories, or, if units do not fit, then developing new categories in which they can find a home
- 4) Recombining/synthesizing data: constant comparison and contrast, involves searching for patterns and themes and integrating data to begin to locate one's own data in existing work;
- 5) Relating and locating your data: to position your inquiry to the existing research literature (p. 261- 263).

The questionnaire data were transferred into Microsoft Excel. The close-ended items were analysed using the basic statistical formula available in the Microsoft Excel. There were 13 closed-ended and 9 open-ended items (with some items both sharing the closed-ended and open-ended questions); for example, questions that requires a 'yes' or a 'no', and then to provide the reasons to explain the answer. The open-ended data items were categorised by looking for response patterns thematically. Thematic analysis looks into patterns of experience or behaviour exhibited by the participants that emerged from the data (Carey, 2012, p. 222). With the intramethod of the questionnaire design, which was explained earlier, it was easier for me to use Microsoft Excel rather than the SPSS programme to record and analyse data, both statistically and thematically. This outcome is also because the statistical part of the analysis was only on the level of basic functions of providing computed tallying, percentages and chart representations. Further, deeper analysis of the statistics was not carried out as initially I intend to obtain a brief picture of where the teachers are generally with the phenomena of change in teaching Pra in Brunei. Only then will I delve further for more in-depth qualitative understanding, using other methods mentioned earlier, which are incorporated in this study.

The classroom observations and interviews were analysed using the grounded theory, which has been mentioned earlier. In the beginning, I used NVIVO 10, a qualitative analysis software, to help facilitation of coding, sorting and analysing the data. However, when I became immersed with the many data sets from the observations and interviews of the teachers, children and senior officers, I realised that it was taking me a long time to sort the data sets into NVIVO 10, as there is much tedious clerical work involved. For example, as the respondents have answered mostly in Malay, and some were using mixed Malay and the English language, the translation work of the documents from

Malay to English required extra sorting as NVIVO 10 can only work on one language for analysis. A lot of time was spent correcting the translations to 'fit' into the English context, as NVIVO 10's language. When I was engaged in lengthy 'corrections' of ensuring the translated words did not lose their original meaning, I found that my understanding of the translated version was disrupted by the English language. The main reason for this problem was that not all Malay words are easily translated into English, and therefore there could be a missing context to the words. Hence, I resorted to reanalysing the data by using the 'pencil, highlighter and paper' method to come to a better understanding of the data.

In my experience of using NVIVO 10, initially it was easy for organising the documented collecting data, by dragging and copying it to NVIVO 10. The initial process of identifying the codes as nodes and then turning them into themes is straightforward. NVIVO 10 is also helpful to assist with organising the memo notes attached to any particular theme. Then, when it comes to analysing the whole data themes across the incorporated methodologies, it became challenging for me to understand the whole thematic process needed to achieve the actual analysis. As a result, I resorted to a pragmatic approach by analysing the themes on paper. This approach helped me to understand the themes further as they interact and emerge across the data. Hence, in my study, NVIVO 10 is used as an organisational tool for the initial stage of coding and for categorising into themes. However, linkages to provide overall finalised themes were created when trying to map out the whole picture, by using the paper method, to enable me to understand the stories of the themes. The approach of initially organising the data using NVIVO 10 and then later analysing the themes further by resorting to the paper method is because after the themes were made, I also encountered the feeling that I was out of touch with the original context of the data, which were almost exclusively in the Malay language. The translation was carefully done so as not to lose any meaning from the original Malay. It is important to note that the Malay language, when translated directly into English, may or may not keep its original meaning. Modifications to the sentences are needed to make the Malay translation fit to the English translation, in order to provide accurate meaning. I spent an extended and rather tedious amount of time trying to ensure the Malay meanings were not lost in translation. However, once putting them into NVIVO 10 and trying to analyse the themes further, I found myself challenged to understanding the themes further. Hence, I

went back to the original untranslated Malay language transcripts, and used them in their raw state, to sort them into codes to extract the themes by using the traditional pencil, highlighter and paper method. This option is only applicable with a small sample of data, such as in this study. Although the data collected were in mixed language, most responses were given in Malay, a few respondents were using bilingual Malay and English language. It is pleasing to report I was 'at ease' when analysing the data in a bilingual context even though, as remarked above, it was very demanding. Great care was taken by me not to lose the quotes original contexts, when presenting the data in the findings chapter.

Being fluent in both Malay and English, the languages that were used to collect the data, has helped me to understand the original content of the data and enabled me to work across the Malay and English languages used in this research, in order to provide the data analysis. The utility of my own translanguaging knowledge, as a tool to aid further in-depth analysis, was employed and of value in this research. Allard (2017), Gort and Pontier (2016) and García and Velasco (2014) added that translanguaging is the ability of bilinguals to self-regulate their flexible linguistic actions to communicate meaning appropriately by viewing languages as an integrated system with other language practices. García and Velasco (2014) further emphasised that the efficient application of translanguaging approaches involves "enactment within a meaningful context, which facilitates the processing of linguistic and writing demands" (p. 21). A colleague I work with at the University of Sheffield, who specialises in Malay and English language, was consulted to check the meanings of the Malay language when translated into English, to confirm that there was no missing original context. This input may be a disadvantage on my side, as NVIVO is a powerful tool to assist in organising the data into respective codes. On the other hand, it also showed that my preference to track the main themes further across the methods adopted in this research had influenced me to go back to the paper method. This move was also partly due to the messy findings. The findings required me to further understand and interpret the data even more critically in order to clarify the change processes. This process, in my experience, is not easily done with NVIVO. I acknowledge and appreciate that NVIVO 10 has helped me to organise data neatly; however, its use still requires manual analysis for coming to terms with the interrelation of the main themes. The complexity of trying to understand what the data illuminates, especially in the observation section, encouraged me to keep cross checking

with the original raw texts. Due to the mixed nature of the original text, I found it easier for me to manually code the data to enable me to enter them into the main thematic analysis. Coding manually was done as a cross check to ensure data stays within its original context after translation work. As a result, I was helped to come to a better understanding of the themes emerging from the change processes happening in the Brunei preschool classrooms.

All of the analysed data will be used to provide recommendations tailored towards the Brunei Darussalam context, in order to manage future implementation of the change processes occurring in early childhood education.

#### **4.15. Ethical considerations**

This section brings deals with the ethical considerations informing this research by focusing on the issues of consent, incidental data and flexibility.

For ethical considerations, ethical forms were submitted to the University of Sheffield for approval to carry out the research. Since the study took place in Brunei, another ethical consideration decision was required from the Ministry of Education, Brunei. Upon receiving ethical approval from the University of Sheffield, I also wrote to the Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, to gain permission to conduct the project for phase one of the research, which required all government preschool teachers to meet at their assigned schools to answer a questionnaire. I also wrote in order to gain consent from the Ministry of Education to access the four selected preschools. Gaining consent allowed me to conduct my research according to the existing local protocols.

For ethical purposes, culturally in Brunei, once approval to conduct the study is given by the respective authorities, especially from the government, the participants will, in effect, be obliged to co-operate. I understand that this is a breach of ethics under the University of Sheffield ethics code; therefore, I obtained further consent from the school principals, teachers, children, and officers involved in this study. The principals were approached and informed verbally as they would usually have received a letter from the Ministry informing them about my intention of conducting research in their schools. However, as a matter of professional courtesy I still asked for their consent prior to carrying out the study. I informed them of the nature and objectives of the research

study and the methodology involved. After approval was gained, I then contacted the principals of the selected preschools, in order to obtain consent from the teachers involved in my study, by using the information sheet and consent form detailed in Appendix 3. After that, I asked consent from the eight sets of parents of the child interviewees who had been selected for the study. The parents were asked, by giving them the information sheet and the consent form (as presented in Appendix 4), to allow their children to participate in the study. For the children, although parental consent had been given, I still asked the children for their consent by using the child-friendly information sheet and consent form shown in Appendix 5; were they willing to share their preschool experiences with me, before I involved them in my study? A single point-in-time consent from a young child is not always sufficient, so on each visit I reminded the children of my role and the purpose of the research. As for the Ministry of Education officers, I also asked for their consent prior to conducting the research discussions with them. Both officers were given an information sheet and a consent form. I also explained to them that they can contact me for any clarification needed with regards to the study and explained their rights to withdraw at any stage of the project if they feel uncomfortable with any process of the study. All participants were recruited on the basis of their voluntary participation and informed consent. All participants were notified that if they wished to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, it was their right to do so, without any repercussions.

I emphasised the strict confidentiality of any data to all participants and used pseudonyms to replace the actual names of the participants to safeguard each participant's identity; no participants could be recognised or identified in this study, other than by the researcher herself. The recorded research discussions, and the pictures taken, were solely used for the purpose of my research analysis. No photographs of children's faces will be used in a public context, nor will any information be revealed that can be used to identify the preschools. No other use was made of the visual data without obtaining written consent; no-one outside the study will be given access to the original data and recordings. Data were stored in a secure environment at Universiti Brunei Darussalam for a minimum of six years after the submission of this thesis, before it will be destroyed.

## **4.16. Issues of research ethics**

### *4.16.1. Consent*

Although consent was gained from the gatekeepers (Department of Schools under the Ministry of Education, Brunei), and also from the school principals, the participants, respective parents, and the University of Sheffield, there were a number of cases where I had to negotiate with, or around, the issue of ethics. The University of Sheffield's letter of ethics approval to conduct research does not apply directly in the Brunei context. In Brunei, there are certain steps needed in order to obtain consent and entry into the schools. These steps of gaining consent have been explained earlier in this chapter under the sub-heading: 'Stages in data collection'. In particular, there is a sensitive 'power issue', usually arising once a researcher is approved and the letter saying so is sent by the Ministry of Education to the relevant locations giving permission to carry out and conduct the research. The Brunei participants in such a study typically have no say. However, following the rules of research ethics and out of respect for the participants involved, I explained to them that they have the right to reject their participation if they do not want to be involved and I will look for other schools as options.

Although consent had been given by the teachers, there were a few times when a teacher rejected a discussion session after being observed. She used reasons such as she was too busy having to attend to administrative work or she was photocopying worksheets for the children. I did not try to force the teacher to give up her time and informed her that she can do the research discussion when she is free. I managed to negotiate with her a time for discussion that she preferred. Personally, I find that it is better to maintain a positive research relationship with the participants and follow their pace. This perception is because, if forced or if a researcher continues being persistent, the situation may end up with the participant feeling as if they are forced or obliged to discuss issues with the researcher (me). Almost certainly such a situation would result in a negative outcome, potentially damaging to the researcher-participant relationship as well as the quality and validity of any information obtained. Therefore, following the participant's pace and time, in addition to appreciating and encouraging their willingness, is crucial in the context of this study and other research. As long as the participant has not withdrawn from the study, it is best to ensure she stays participating, as a series of classroom observations have been documented.

#### *4.16.2. Incidental data: Inappropriate practice of the teacher*

There was an incident on 5 April 2014, during classroom observation. During the observed teachers' inappropriate practice with children, I did not try to intervene, as I reminded myself that my positionality is as a non-participatory observer. This status means that the participants are aware of my presence and intentions of observing and not joining in activities (Newby, 2014). After the lesson, the teacher and I had our research discussion regarding the day's activity. I discussed the critical incident with one of the school's senior personnel to seek their advice and so discussed the matter with the assistant principal. I consulted my supervisor and my colleagues by discussing the matter anonymously and not directing them to which preschool setting and teacher it was. Brodie (2013) mentioned that as part of the ethics in observing and working with children, being involved with children includes responsibilities of concern regarding actions and children's rights. If I left the observation and were to continue to another school, I would not feel at ease and would be left wondering about the child's well-being. It is also against what I believe as a person. Being disrespectful of others, and the use of impolite words, are against Islamic practice. This is also in conflict with the Ministry of Education, Brunei Teachers Handbook and with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child of 1989, Article 3. In the best interests of the child, "with all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration, ... protection and care is necessary for his or her well-being..." (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017).

#### *4.16.3. Flexibility*

To facilitate my research, it was important to provide flexibility to the teachers regarding the time and place for research observation and discussion to take place. I made sure I called in to the relevant school or office to confirm the agreed time and place was still convenient. This procedure was necessary because there were some cases when the observations needed to be done on another day due to unforeseen circumstances that could not be avoided. For example, the teacher may be unwell, she may have an extra busy schedule, or the meeting's timing coincides with teachers' pre-planned meeting activities at the Ministry. Also, sometimes teachers were taken out from school during their teaching period for training sessions, such as a curriculum

review at the Ministry of Education, liaising with the consultants for the on-going project that they were involved with.

#### **4.17. Summary**

This methodology chapter has mentioned a) the mixed method research design, b) interpretive research as the theoretical framework of this study, c) the methodology in using grounded theory, d) the three phases of implementing the research, e) the analytical strategies applied to the data and f) the ethical requirements associated with the research. Although I have obtained ethical permission to conduct my research, there are things that happened moment by moment. It is not just about coming into a setting, it is my relationship with ethical considerations that is not static; ethical factors were constantly evident throughout the study. In particular I was focused on the ethical ways of being with children, as explained in this chapter under the subheading: 'Interviews with the children in practice'. The incidental data mentioned above put me in a challenging position, and showed another example of how ethics is alive in the research process, according to the researcher's values and practice. The next chapter looks into the findings from the questionnaires, interviews, observations and document data analysis.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings obtained to clarify the research aim mentioned earlier: to understand the change processes in teaching and learning that are going on in Brunei's government preschools. The research has also investigated the teaching and learning experiences of Bruneian teachers and children in the preschool classes at this time of curriculum reform. One approach to achieving this latter aim is to observe how teachers are developing their lessons and implementing reform processes in their expected pedagogical practice. How children are learning in class is also noted in detail, particularly by the researcher taking into account both the teacher and children's their experiences. A further aim is to find out from the ministerial level, especially the expert senior officers in the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and the Curriculum Department unit, what are the expectations in terms of the change processes as these occur? Also investigated was how these senior officers support the preschool teachers. The data presented in this chapter are set in four parts reflecting the main data sources of this study: i) teachers, ii) children, iii) experts and iv) policy.

### **5.2. Findings from teachers**

In order to understand where the teachers are with the change processes in teaching and learning that are currently happening in Brunei's government preschools, I will first bring in the data from the questionnaire that was completed by 123 Brunei government preschool teachers, to give an overview of their perceptions on the changes. Then, my zooming in to the four main preschool teachers' interviews, and the findings from classroom observation, will give a more detailed insight into the change processes in teaching and learning occurring in Brunei's preschool education system.

### **5.3. Questionnaire findings**

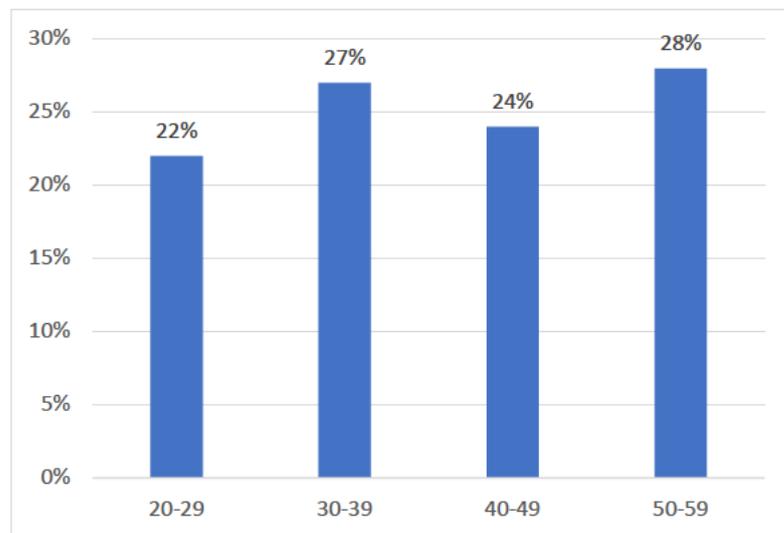
The questionnaire below was distributed to 256 preschool government teachers, with the researcher receiving completed responses from 123 of the teachers, who were located throughout Brunei. The following sections present details of the respondents' demographics: 1) gender, 2) age, 3) qualifications, and 4) years of teaching experience at the preschool level.

### 5.3.1. Gender

The gender distribution of the respondents was 97% (n= 119) female dominant and 3% (n= 4) male.

### 5.3.2. Age

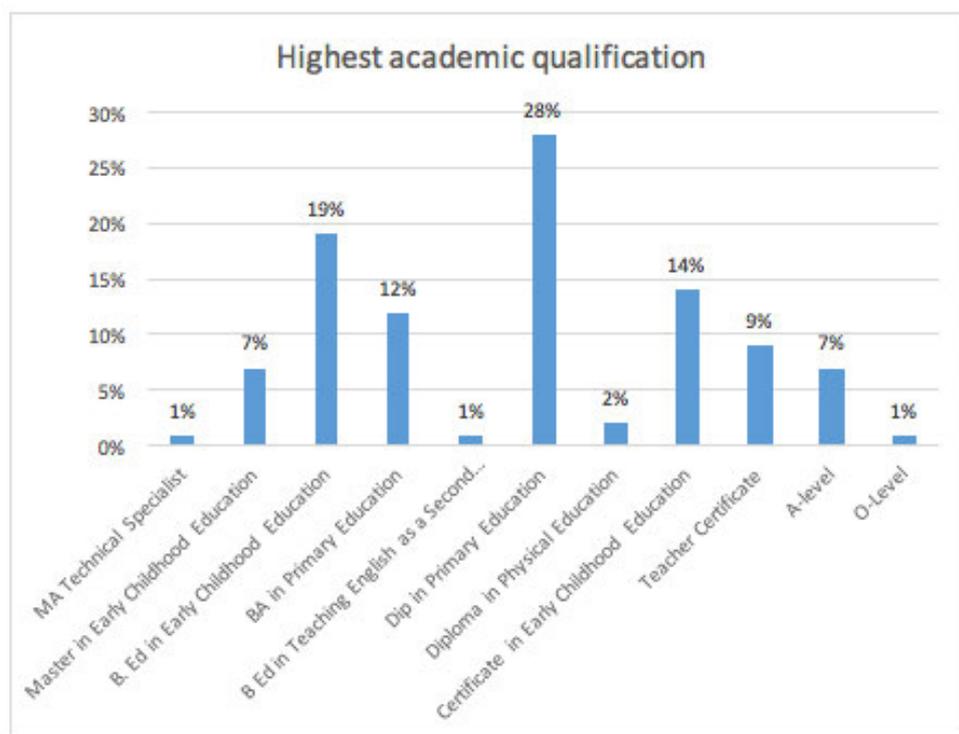
Figure 5.1 below shows 28% (n= 34) of the respondents of the questionnaire are from the 50-59 age range, all of whom are senior teachers. The 30-39 age group is only 1% smaller with 27% (n= 33); the 40-49 age group contains 24% (n= 29) and the 20-29 age group is the smallest with 22% (n= 27).



**Figure 5.1. Age distribution of questionnaire respondents**

### 5.3.3. Highest academic qualifications

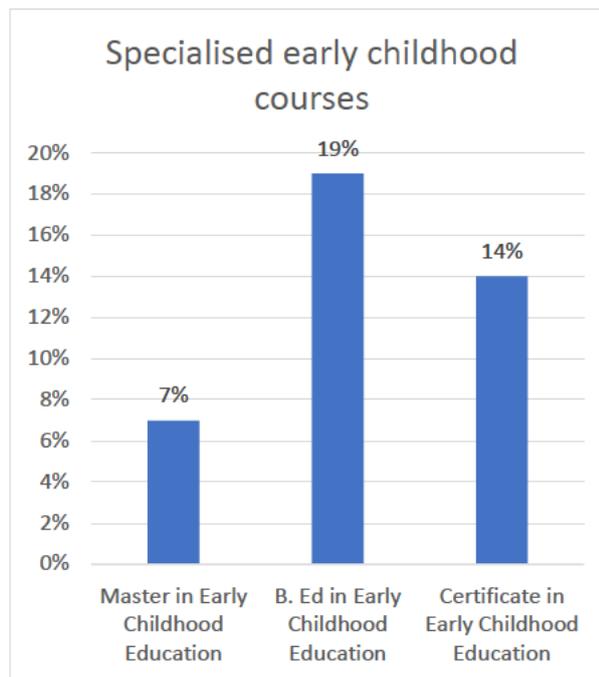
Figure 5.2 below shows 40% (n= 49) of the teachers are graduates of specialised early childhood courses, while the rest (60%, n= 74) are holders of non-specialised early childhood qualifications.



**Figure 5.2. Qualification distribution**

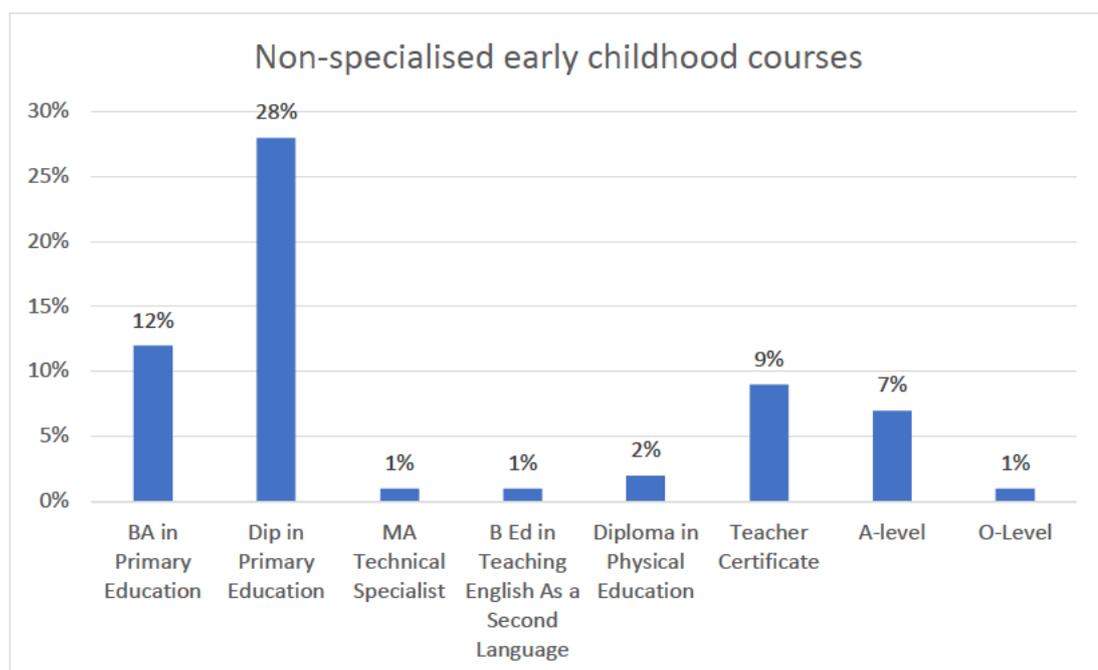
This data shows that 60% of the Brunei preschool government teachers need to be further trained, by providing them with opportunities to upgrade their qualifications to specialised early childhood courses.

It is better to view the above figure by extracting the specialised early childhood qualifications and the non-specialised early childhood qualifications, as shown in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4 below.



**Figure 5.3. Distribution of specialised early childhood courses**

Figure 5.3 is an extraction from Figure 5.2 to show the types of specialised early childhood qualifications of the teachers. 7% of the teachers are graduates of Master in Early Childhood Education courses; 19% of the teachers have a B.Ed. degree in Early Childhood Education and 14% of the teachers are Certificate in Early Childhood Education holders.



**Figure 5.4. Distribution of non-specialised early childhood courses**

Figure 5.4 is an extraction part from Figure 5.2 to show the types of non-specialised early childhood qualifications of the teachers. 12% of the teachers are graduates with a BA in Primary Education; 28% are graduates with a Diploma in Primary Education; 1% of the graduates has a MA Technical Specialist degree; 1% of the graduates has a B.Ed. in Teaching English as a Second Language; 2% are graduates with a Diploma in Physical Education; 9% graduates with a Teaching Certificate; 7% A-Level graduates and 1% O-Level graduates.

#### *5.3.4. Years of teaching experience at preschool level*

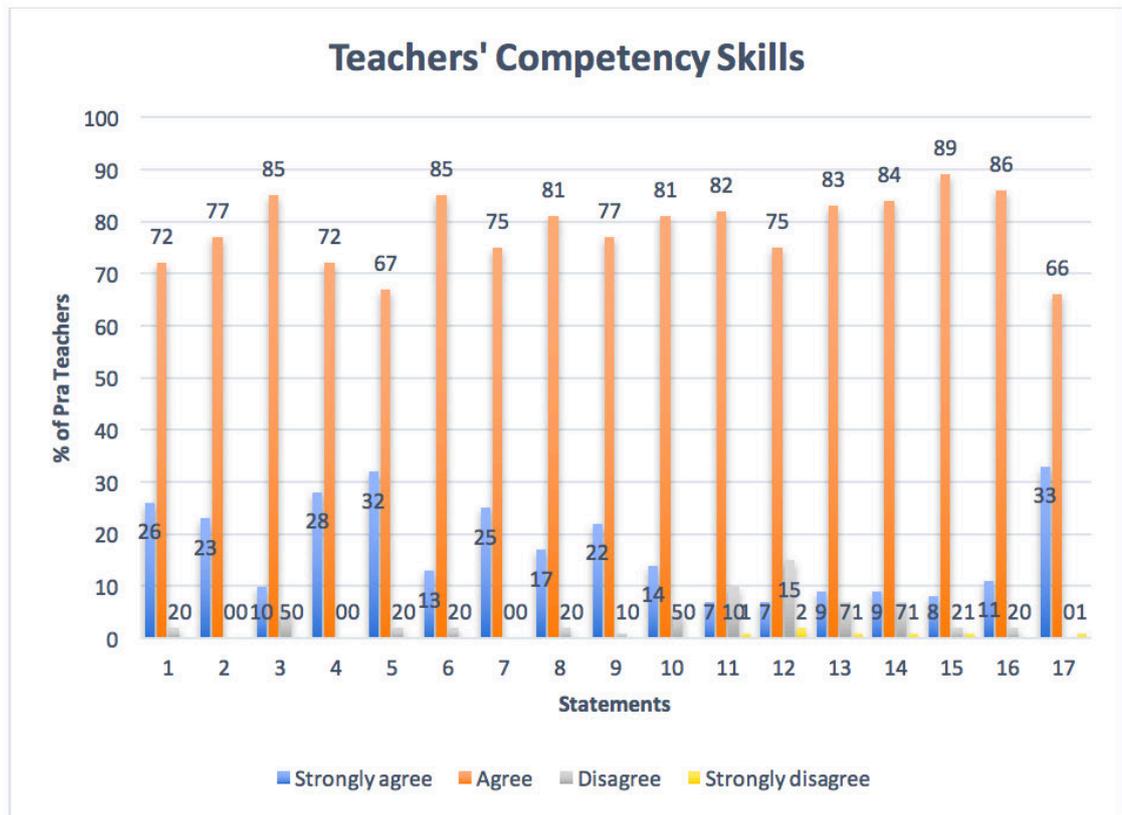
9 years of teaching experience at preschool level is the average teaching experience of the 123 teachers who completed the questionnaire in this study.

#### *5.3.5. Teachers' competency skills*

The next part of the questionnaire (item 11) seeks to find out the participants' teaching competencies. The teachers were given 17 statements to which they were required to respond by choosing from a scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree to strongly disagree. The responses are presented in Table 5.1 and Figure 5.5 below, in their respective percentages.

**Table 5.1. Distribution of statements on teachers teaching competencies**

No.	Statement	Total No. of Teachers= 123 (100%)			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I am confident in teaching Pra	32 (26%)	88 (72%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
2	I understand the Pra syllabus	28 (23%)	95 (77%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3	I understand the requirements of SPN21 for Pra	12 (10%)	105 (85%)	0 (0%)	6 (5%)
4	I am aware of my role as a Pra teacher	35 (28%)	88 (72%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5	I am able to work collaboratively with other Pra teachers	39 (32%)	82 (67%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
6	I know my own strengths and areas requiring growth (able to do self-reflection) in my teaching and learning for Pra	16 (13%)	104 (85%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
7	I am seeking out information from other sources about the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra to understand it better	31 (25%)	92 (75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
8	I am prepared to apply and adapt the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra	21 (17%)	99 (81%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
9	I am making deliberate efforts to coordinate with other Pra teachers using the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra	27 (22%)	95 (77%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
10	I know how to set up learning corners in my Pra class	17 (14%)	100 (81%)	0 (0%)	6 (5%)
11	I know how to apply the project approach in my teaching and learning	9 (7%)	101 (82%)	1 (1%)	12 (10%)
12	I know how to use the mind map for my lesson plan	9 (7%)	92 (75%)	3 (2%)	19 (15%)
13	I know how to involve parents in Pra activities	11 (9%)	102 (83%)	1 (1%)	9 (7%)
14	I know how to plan and prepare for end of term showcase for Pra	11 (9%)	103 (84%)	1 (1%)	8 (7%)
15	I know how to apply learning through play in my Pra activities	10 (8%)	109 (89%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)
16	I know how to get materials for teaching and learning Pra	14 (11%)	106 (86%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)
17	Teachers are agents of change in children's learning	41 (33%)	81 (66%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)



**Figure 5.5. Distribution of statements on teachers’ teaching competencies**

With the ongoing education reforms that the teachers are facing in their everyday lives, the questionnaire has sought to find out whether the teachers are confident in delivering their lessons. From Table 5.1, only three teachers (2%) out of 123 register were honest enough to admit that they do not feel confident. However, 88 teachers (72%) agree and 32 teachers (26%) strongly agree that they are confident in their teaching. This result indicates the 123 respondent teachers are mostly confident in delivering their teaching at the time of the introduced changes.

All 123 teachers said they understand the Pra syllabus, which is the preschool curriculum (n= 95, 77% agree and n= 28, 23% strongly agree). This information is important to know; the teachers are agreeing that they have a good understanding of the Pra syllabus in delivering their lesson, taking into account the ongoing phenomena of changes in their pedagogy.

117 (95%) out of 123 teachers at least agreed that they understand the requirements of SPN21; 105 teachers (85%) agreed and 12 teachers (10%) strongly agreed, while the remaining 6 teachers (5%) disagreed that ‘they understood SPN21’s requirements’.

All 123 teachers are aware of their role as a Pra teacher; 72% (n= 88) agreed and 28% (n= 35) strongly agreed with the statement.

When asked if they were able to work collaboratively, most of the teachers responded that they are capable of doing so. Exceptionally, two of the teachers disagreed that they are able to work collaboratively with other Pra teachers, while 67% (n= 82) agreed and 32% (n= 39) strongly agreed that they can work together.

120 out of 123 teachers (98%) know their own strengths and areas requiring growth, into which they are able to do self-reflection in their teaching and learning for Pra; 85% (n= 104) agreed and 13% (n= 16) strongly agreed. 2% (n= 3) of the teachers strongly disagreed.

All 123 teachers, 75% (n= 92) agreed and 25% (n= 31) strongly agreed, that they would seek out information from other sources about the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra, in order to understand them better.

It was found that 98% (n= 120) of the teachers are prepared to apply and adapt the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra, with 81% (n= 99) agreeing, and 17% (n= 21) strongly agreeing. The remaining 2% (n= 3) of the teachers disagreed with the statement because they are not prepared yet to apply and adapt the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra.

99% (n= 122) of the teachers are making deliberate efforts to coordinate with other Pra teachers using the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra; 77% (n= 95) agreed, 22% (n= 27) strongly agreed, and 1% (n=1) disagreed with the statement.

95% (n= 117) of the teachers either strongly agree (81%, n=100), or agree (14%, n= 17) that they know how to set up learning corners in their Pra class; while 5% (n= 6) disagree.

89% (n= 110) of the teachers know how to apply the project approach in their teaching and learning; 82% (n= 101) agree and 7% (n= 9) strongly agree. The remaining 11%

(n= 13) of the teachers do not know how to apply the project approach: 10% (n= 12) disagree and 1%, (n= 1) strongly disagree.

As for the mind map approach, 82% (n= 101) of the teachers know how to use the mind map for their lesson planning; 75% (n= 92) agreed and 7% (n= 9) strongly agreed. However, 17% (n= 22) of the teachers do not know how to use it; 15% (n= 19) disagreed and 2% (n= 3) strongly disagreed.

113 teachers (92%) out of 123 know how to involve parents in Pra activities; 83% (n= 102) agree and 9% (n= 11) strongly agree. On the other hand, there were 10 teachers (8%) who did not know how to involve parents; 7% (n= 9) disagreed and 1% (n=1) strongly disagreed.

For the showcase, 93% (n= 114) of the teachers know how to plan and prepare for the end of term showcase for Pra; 84% (n= 103) agree and 9% (n= 11) strongly agree. Of the remaining nine teachers 7% (n= 8) disagreed and 1% (n= 1) strongly disagreed; in other words, they felt they did not know how to plan and prepare the end of term showcase.

97% (n= 119) teachers knew how to apply learning through play in their Pra activities 89% (n= 109) agree and 8% (n= 10) strongly agree while 3% (n= 4) do not know how to apply it; 2% (n= 3) disagree and 1% (n= 1) strongly disagree

Only 3 (2%) out of 123 teachers thought they did not know how to get materials for teaching and learning Pra. The remaining 120 teachers (97%) know how to get them, with 86% (n= 106) agreeing and 11% (n= 14) strongly agreeing.

99% (n= 122) of the teachers agree that teachers are agents of change in children's learning, with 66% (n= 81) agreeing and 33% (n= 41) strongly agreeing, while 1% (n= 1) strongly disagreed.

The data from the teachers' competency skills sends an important message that most teachers are embracing the changes positively; always with the proviso that they have responded truthfully.

### 5.3.6. Experience of any changes in teaching Pra

Item 12 in the questionnaire tries to find out whether teachers are experiencing any changes in teaching Pra; such as changes in teaching style and preparing lessons. 118 teachers (96%) experienced changes in their teaching while 5 teachers (4%) had not experienced any changes. The data further showed that teachers are mostly embracing changes with broad agreements, and that some are also having reservations on the way the changes are being implemented.

### 5.3.7. Three main changes in teaching Pra in the teachers' own classrooms

In item 13 of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to list three main changes in teaching Pra in their own classroom. Tables 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 (below) show the distribution of the teachers' first, second and third major changes. Figure 5.6 below summarises the findings for the three main changes identified by the teachers in their own classrooms. The first major change is using a 'mind map' approach in teaching (24%, n= 29), followed by the 'project' approach (23%, n= 28); the third change is the showcase (33%, n= 41). Due to the open-endedness of this item in the questionnaire, the teachers' responses vary, informed by the different experiences of change faced by those teachers.

**Table 5.2. First major change**

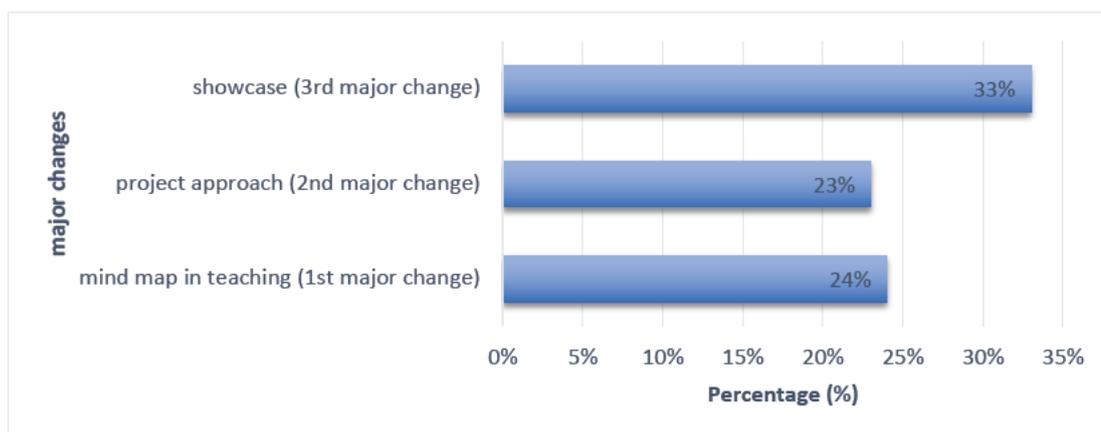
No.	First major change	No. of teachers	% of teachers
1	Mind map for teaching	29	24%
2	Teaching phonics	9	7%
3	Project approach	15	12%
4	Transformation of class (special rooms)	5	4%
5	Change of children each term	17	14%
6	Learning through play	1	1%
7	Teaching children with special needs	3	2%
8	Transformation of class layout/learning corners	8	7%
9	Showcase	11	9%
10	Mind map for lesson plan	20	16%
11	Orientation before school starts	1	1%
12	Using ICT in class	2	2%
13	Using integration approach effectively	1	1%
14	Disciplining children	1	1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.3. Second major change**

No.	Second major change	No. of teachers	% of teachers
1	Teaching phonics	7	6%
2	Mind map for teaching	19	15%
3	Project approach	28	23%
4	Child centred	2	2%
5	Showcase	24	20%
6	Learning through play	1	1%
7	Mind map for lesson plan	14	11%
8	Change of children each term	5	4%
9	Transformation of classroom layout/learning corners	12	10%
10	Using ICT in class	1	1%
11	Transformation of class/specialised room	5	4%
12	Disciplining children	2	2%
13	Integration of subjects	3	2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.4. Third major change**

No.	Third major change	No. of teachers	% of teachers
1	Project approach	22	18%
2	Transformation of classroom/specialised room	5	4%
3	Mind map for teaching	17	14%
4	Learning through play	3	2%
5	Child centred	1	1%
6	Mind map for lesson plan	11	9%
7	Transformation of classroom layout/learning corners	5	4%
8	Showcase	41	33%
9	Change of children each term	6	5%
10	Teaching using ICT	1	1%
11	Teaching phonics	8	7%
12	Educational visits	1	1%
13	Using integration approach effectively	1	1%
14	Disciplining children	1	1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 5.6. Three major changes on teaching Pra experienced by teachers**

### 5.3.8. Views whether changes in teaching and learning Pra is necessary

In Item 14, teachers were asked whether they think that changes in teaching and learning Pra are necessary and, if 'yes', to provide their reason(s). There are 82% (n= 101) of the teachers who think that it is necessary to have changes in teaching and learning Pra; 15% (n= 18) of the teachers think that it is not necessary, while 3% (n= 4) did not provide any answers.

Extracted reasons on why change is not necessary are:

*“Not necessary, it depends on how the teacher wants to implement their teaching”. (s35)*

*“Does not need change as in Year 1, there is no continuation from Pra to Year 1 in terms of teaching approaches, especially for project approach”. (s73)*

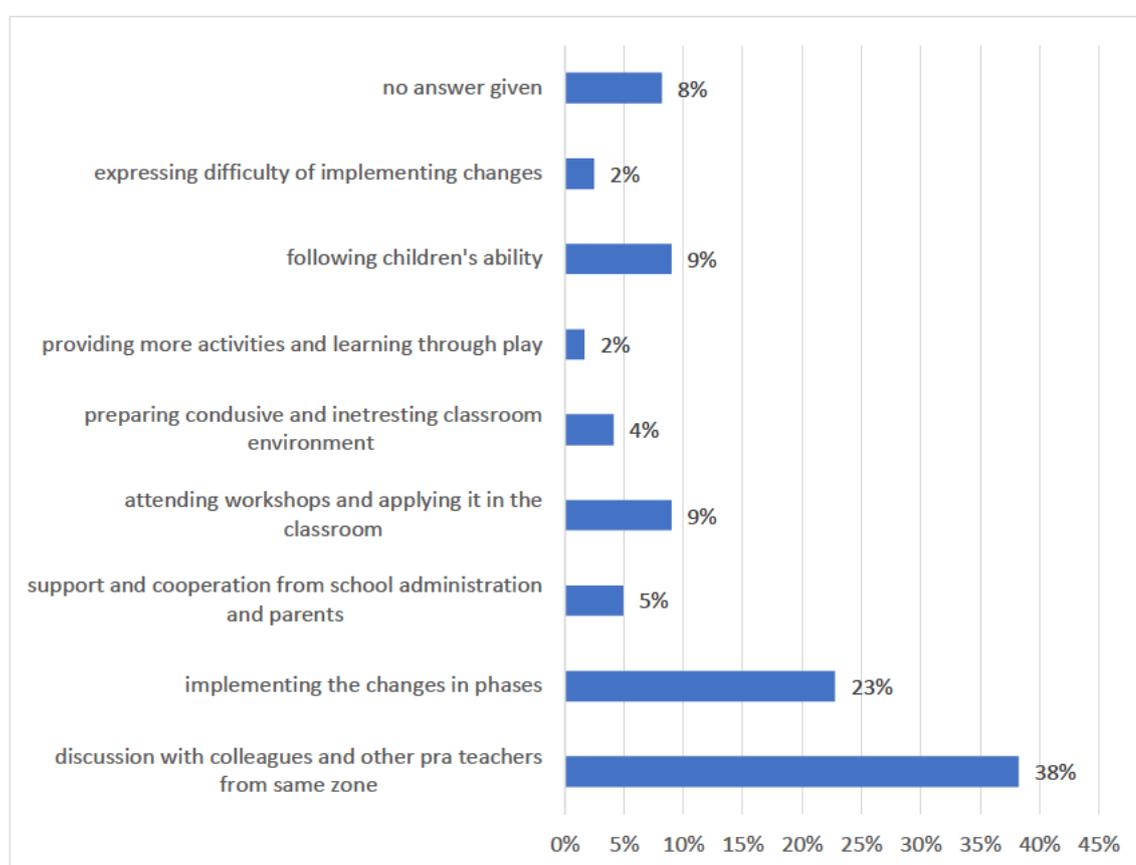
*“Changes are not necessary as the previous teaching and learning approaches are still relevant and children can understand better”. (s83)*

*“Only teaching and learning in the future needs to be improved”. (s89)*

### 5.3.9. Managing the main areas of change in the classrooms

Questionnaire item 15 aimed to find out how teachers are managing the main areas of change in their classrooms. The majority of the teachers (38%, n= 47) managed the main areas of change in their classroom by having discussions with their own colleagues, as well as Pra teachers from other schools. There are 23% (n= 28) of the teachers who managed change by implementing the changes to their classrooms in phases. This group was followed by 9% (n= 11) of the teachers who managed change by attending workshops and applying newly acquired knowledge in their classrooms.

Also, another 9% (n= 11) of the teachers managed the changes by introducing them in parallel with the children's ability levels. Support and cooperation from the school administration and the parents constitute 5% (n= 6) of the teachers' ways in managing the changes. It is found that 4% (n= 5) of the teachers mentioned they managed the changes by preparing conducive and interesting classroom environments. The findings showed that 2% (n= 2) of the teachers provided more activities and learning through play as their way of managing the changes. Meanwhile 2% (n= 3) of the teachers expressed difficulty with implementing the changes in their classrooms. Figure 5.7 below, shows the distribution of the data mentioned earlier.



**Figure 5.7. Teachers ways of managing the main areas of change in their classroom**

The difficulties faced in managing the changes in 2% (n= 3) of the teachers' classrooms were identified as: i) the need to understand the changes; ii) the high ratio of children to the adult(s); iii) the classroom environment not being conducive to carrying out the planned initiated teaching and learning; and iv) the difficulty in handling the big number of children without any assistant teachers.

Extracted difficulties faced by the teachers in managing change are:

*“I need to understand further about the transformation before implementing it slowly”. (s66)*

*“Difficult to handle due to the big number of children, classroom environment that is not conducive for children to do the suggested planned activities”. (s80)*

*“Difficult to handle as Pra teachers does not have assistant teachers and handling a lot of children is challenging”. (s73)*

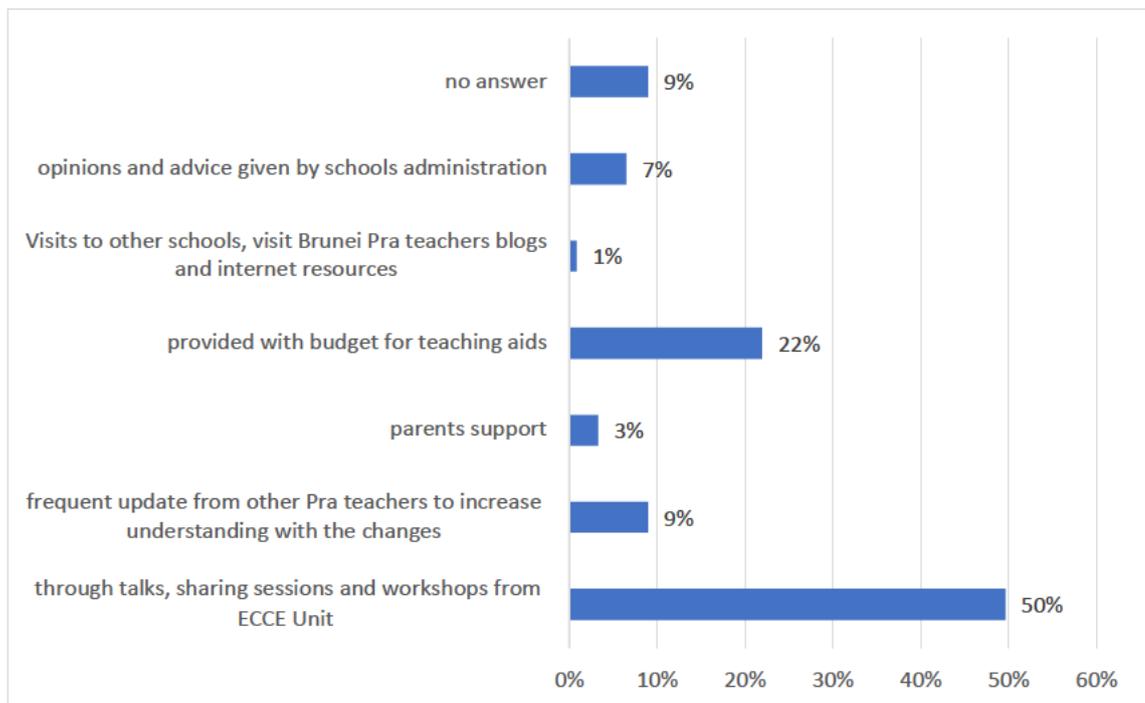
#### *5.3.10. Support in managing change*

Item 16 of the questionnaire asked the teachers whether they have support in managing the change in teaching and learning Pra. 88% (n= 108) of the teachers said they received support in managing change, while 11% (n= 14) of the teachers mentioned they did not receive any support and 1% (n= 1) provided no answer.

#### *5.3.11. Types of support provided in managing the change in teaching and learning Pra*

Item 17 of the questionnaire asked about the kinds of support given in managing the changes in teaching and learning Pra. Figure 5.8 (below) shows the types of support given, based on data from the teachers’ responses. It was found that half of the teachers (50%, n= 61) acquired support in managing change through talks, sharing sessions with Pra teachers from other schools and attending workshops run by the ECCE Unit:

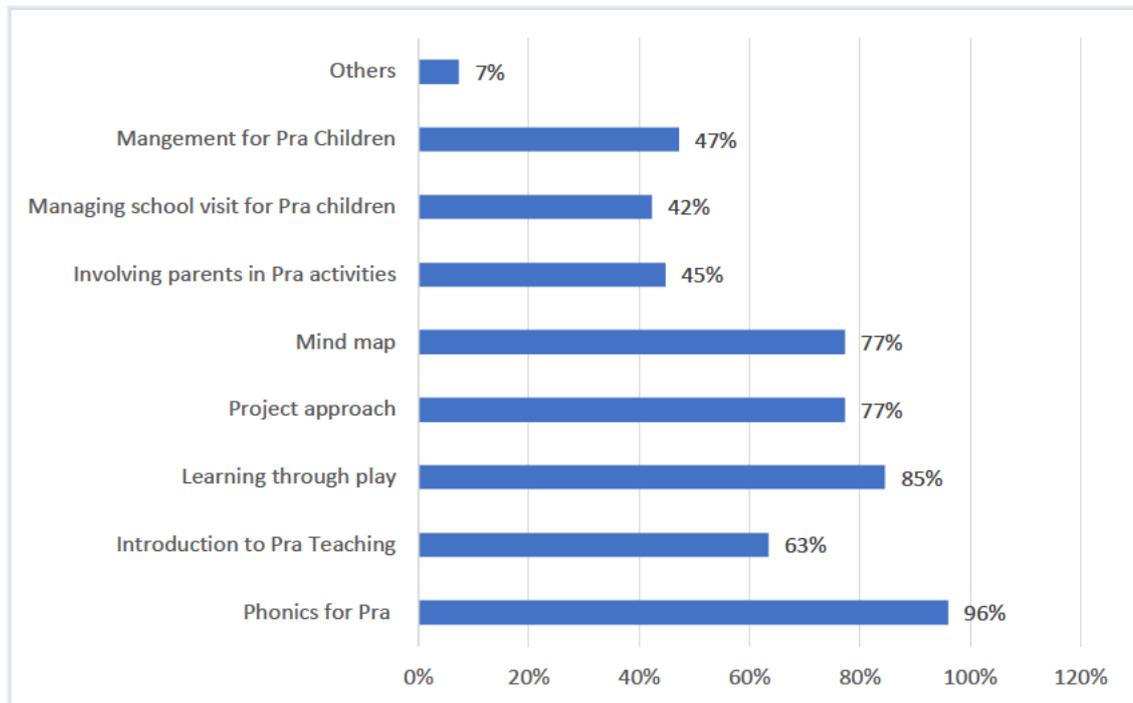
- a) 22% (n= 27) received support through budget provision for teaching aids;
- b) 9% (n= 11) through frequent updates from other Pra teachers to increase understanding of the changes;
- c) 7% (n= 8) from opinions and advice given by the school administration;
- d) 3% (n= 4) from parental support; and
- e) 1% (n= 1) from visits to other schools, visit Brunei Pra teachers’ blogs and internet resources.



**Figure 5.8. Types of support provided in managing the change in teaching and learning Pra**

### 5.3.12. Training provided to assist teachers to adapt to the change in Pra

Item 18 asked about the training provided by the Ministry of Education to assist the teachers to adapt to the changes in Pra. Figure 5.9 (below) shows the distribution of the training in percentages. The distribution of training data helps us to understand that the teachers have been attending most of the workshops that support the teachers to adapt to the changes in Pra. The findings showed that more than half of the teachers in this study, ranging from 77% to 96%, have attended the workshops that have been introduced to support the initiated changes as follows: a) phonics for Pra (96%, n= 118) and b) through play (85%, n= 104); with 77% (n= 95) attending both the project and the mind map sessions. 7% (n= 9) of the teachers provided additional information to other workshops they attended that is not provided in the given list of item 19. In this additional information list are issues such as: i) using teaching aids for Pra, ii) transformation on classroom layout workshop, iii) workshops on children with special needs and iv) workshops on flip album. This data revealed that the Ministry is active in providing support and preparing the teachers to manage the changes that are being introduced in the teaching and learning for Pra, as reported by the teachers.



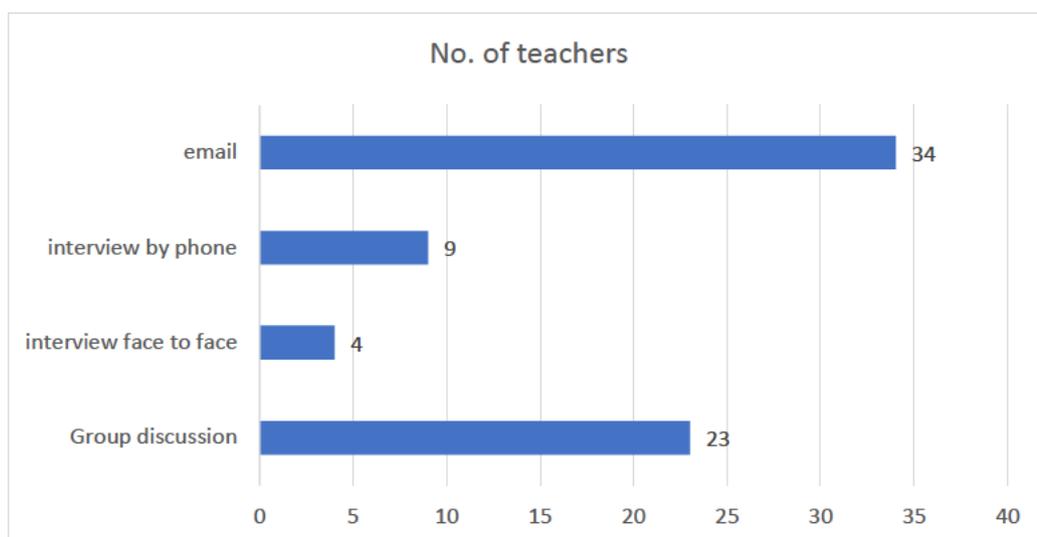
**Figure 5.9. Trainings provided by the Ministry of Education attended by the teachers**

*5.3.13. Teachers willing to share their change experience further in teaching Pra*

Items number 19 asked the teachers if they are willing to share their experiences in the changes happening in their teaching Pra. From 123 teachers, 57% (n= 70) teachers are willing and 43% (n= 53) are not willing to share their experiences.

*5.3.14. Willing teachers preferred ways of communicating further on their change experiences in teaching Pra*

Item number 20 asked those teachers who were willing to share their experiences, to select their preferred sharing option: a) group discussion, b) individual face to face interview, c) interview by phone, and d) answering a set of questions by email. Their preferred means of communicating the way that they would share their experiences further are shown in Figure 5.10 (below). The most preferred means for the teachers to share their experiences further is by answering a set of questions by email (48%, n= 34), followed by group discussion (33%, n= 23), then phone interview (13%, n=9) and face-to-face individual interview (6%, n= 4).



**Figure 5.10. Teachers preferred ways of communicating their change experiences further**

#### **5.4. Key themes from the questionnaire findings**

The design of the questionnaire, with most items being open-ended, assisted me to understand, as an overview, that teachers are mostly embracing changes with broad agreement, while some are also having reservations on the way changes are being implemented. There are three key themes that were identified from the questionnaire: i) positive, ii) difficulties and iii) cautious. Some of the teachers are positive towards the changes, some offered cautious responses, and some of the teachers were very honest about the difficulties they were facing. Details of these three key themes are presented in Table 5.5, Table 5.6, and Table 5.7 (below).

##### *5.4.1. Positive*

The positive theme that emerged from the teachers' ways of embracing changes in teaching Pra identified from the questionnaire are presented as three sub-themes: i) positive communication among parents, teachers and other Pra teachers; ii) positive attitudes towards encouraging training, and, iii) positive attitudes towards improving quality in preschools. The sub-themes and extracts from the questionnaire for the positive theme, are illustrated in Table 5.5 (below).

**Table 5.5. Key theme 1: Positive themes that emerged from the questionnaire**

<b>Theme One: Positive</b>	
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Extracts from questionnaire</b>
Positive communication among parents, teachers and other Pra teachers.	<i>It is good and there are improvements because teachers and parents are communicating (s19).</i>
	<i>The changes for now are beneficial like there is communication with parents, sharing ideas, sharing challenges with other teachers (s48).</i>
Positive towards encouraging training	<i>Agree with the changes implemented and would like more information about the transformation (s62).</i>
	<i>More training is needed for Pra teachers to ensure the success of the transformation (s75).</i>
	<i>Provide more workshops and briefings related to transformation (s77).</i>
	<i>More detailed workshops that are thorough (s79).</i>
	<i>To have more courses and workshops for teachers regarding transformation for teaching Pra (s116).</i>
	<i>More thorough training needed (s4).</i>
Positive towards improving quality in preschools	<i>Children are more lively and active, more confident in their learning; children are able to give their ideas spontaneously (s11).</i>
	<i>As long as it gives benefits to Pra children, it won't be a problem to all teachers. But in order to accept some changes, there are things that need to be done with patience and positive attitude is also crucial (s117).</i>
	<i>Can continue the change as SPN21 is one good change as it can improve the quality of learning (s121).</i>
	<i>At the beginning the changes are difficult to implement but after a while problems can be overcome (s118).</i>
	<i>I am still learning and trying to understand the changes needed and try my best to implement it (s119).</i>
	<i>The current transformation changes are positive as through this change, parents are more involved in their children's work and aware on the importance of preschool (s123).</i>
	<i>Attending to the calls of SPN21 where children need good communication skills (s25).</i>
	<i>It helps teachers to teach effectively (s40).</i>
	<i>Keep up the change in making preschool quality better (s29).</i>
	<i>Time changes and children change so approach needs to change according to current needs (s65).</i>
	<i>The mind map, show case and lesson plan are all good and there is no problem (s105).</i>

#### 5.4.2. Difficulties

The second key theme that emerged from the teachers' way of embracing changes in teaching Pra, based on data from the questionnaire, is *difficulties*. Three sub-themes emerge: i) changing children every term, ii) the need for teachers' assistants, iii) pressure on the young preschool children to be able to read, write and count. The sub-

themes and extracts for the second key theme on difficulties is shown in Table 5.6 below.

**Table 5.6. Key theme 2: Difficulties that emerged from the questionnaire**

Theme two: Difficulties	
Sub-themes	Extracts from questionnaire
Changing children every term	<i>Transformation of classroom is confusing. Changing children every term and discipline of the children is not organised and difficult to observe the children's development (s91).</i>
	<i>I prefer teaching my own Pra children throughout the whole year as parents don't like the idea of transformation plus every term there are a lot of parents who demand to transfer back to my class (from other classes). Every term, there are kids crying not wanting to change class (s34).</i>
	<i>Children always cry when it is time to change classes and it is a slow process and takes a lot of time to get back on the learning track (s103).</i>
	<i>Teacher needs to know the children every term with changing children, making it a challenge to keep up with their learning progress from term 1 (s47).</i>
	<i>Changes in changing children every term is not good as children take time to get used to their new environment and disrupts their lesson (s105).</i>
	<i>Changing children every term is not encouraged as parents, children and teacher does not feel comfortable and creates problems (s122).</i>
	<i>We have to teach new set of children where we will have to apply new rules for them to learn (s49).</i>
	<i>Changing children makes discipline unmanageable and no continuation of teaching and learning. This creates problem for teachers to monitor children's progress (s93).</i>
The need for teachers' assistants	<i>Teachers who are having children with special needs in the class, the changes implemented can be challenging and there is a need to have teacher assistant (s58).</i>
	<i>In order to make the transformation a success, all Pra teachers need an assistant teacher to help in the classroom(s34).</i>
Pressure to be able to read, write and count.	<i>Mind mapping cannot develop children's ideas or thinking as children at this stage does not know how to read and write yet (s91 and s93).</i>
	<i>I find it difficult to establish these changes for there is so much to do with the syllabus and so little time. I personally think that it is such a hassle to make their transformation of classes (s120).</i>
	<i>Project and mind map approach takes a lot of time and children are less focused and give less attention as they cannot read and write (s96).</i>
	<i>Teaching at preschool is fun but with the drastic changes that need to be implemented makes it a challenge (s75).</i>
	<i>There is a lot to achieve and do. Writing, reading, counting skills are all disrupted due to lots of project activities, drama play that takes a lot of time (s91).</i>
	<i>Highlight on the downward pressures from Year 1 that emphasises on children's ability to read. To take into account other areas, especially reading, it is difficult to monitor progress with changing the children every term. Because at the end of the day, that is what matters the most (s65).</i>

#### *5.4.3. Cautious*

The third key theme that emerges from the way the teachers are embracing the changes in teaching Pra, from the questionnaire, is being cautious. Under this theme, being cautious (or exercising caution) has three sub-themes; a) change to be implemented in phases, b) the need to pilot/trial required changes, and c) awareness on current development progress of the changes initiated. The sub-themes and the extracts for the third key theme of being cautious are shown below in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7. Key theme 3: Cautious themes that emerged from the questionnaire**

<b>Key Theme Three: Cautious</b>	
<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Extracts from questionnaire</b>
Change to be implemented in phases	<i>Changes needed and done by phases. Teachers need to fully understand and skilled to be able to implement the changes (s82).</i>
	<i>Teaching Pra is fun but with the changes that are done drastically and all at once brings burden for us Pra teachers. The changes should be introduced by phases (s52).</i>
	<i>Changes need to be introduced in phases and time given for adapting (s60).</i>
	<i>Transformation is needed and necessary in teaching and learning Pra but not to be done drastically (s63).</i>
	<i>Changes need to be introduced by phases according to the situation of particular schools. Changes needs to be introduced not in a rush (s66).</i>
	<i>Change is good when done slowly and not drastically (s70).</i>
	<i>All change is good but the changes implemented should be introduced slowly (s10).</i>
The need to pilot/trial required changes	<i>It is recommended for all parties involved in ECCE to build initiative in doing continuous research to enable us to change the systems according to current needs. Any changes made should be given trial first before implementing it in the whole country (s50).</i>
	<i>Changes done are positive and in accordance to the needs of SPN21. Before introducing the changes, there is a need to pilot especially the changing of class so that it can be evaluated appropriately (s55).</i>
	<i>The changes introduced should be done by phases. The changes should also be piloted first like having pilot schools so we can have reference and see its suitability (s81).</i>
Awareness on current development progress of the changes initiated	<i>Without good foundation at the beginning of Pra not only teachers at Year 1 will face difficulty to teach the children if the children do not understand the concept... no continuation of Pra teaching approaches to Year one (s117)</i>
	<i>For the relevant people to be more aware with Pra teachers' problems in implementing the changes. There is no need to move places for teaching and learning like term one, Pra A changes to Pra B (s64).</i>
	<i>Changes are necessary and I need it but it should not be too stressful for teachers, sharing with other Pra teachers is good, positive feedback with ways of improving is also good (s104).</i>
	<i>Awareness of current change development for Pra, support and help from the principal and other Pra teachers are needed to deliver the changes required smoothly (s67).</i>
	<i>Questionnaire should be done before the transformation is implemented fully to find out teachers understanding and classroom suitability (s73 and s80).</i>
	<i>Needs to be monitored from time to time. Needs to be given assistance and give understanding and skills needed to implement the transformation effectively (s82).</i>
	<i>To revise the suitability of the changes without ignoring other teaching approaches that has been used before the changes (s83 and s87).</i>
	<i>Transformation changes can be done but needs to look at the school situation. Look into children's conditions, needs, room environment, whether they have assistant teachers or not. Honestly, I am not agreeing to the changes implemented now (s107).</i>
	<i>Hope the support given will be continuous from various appropriate agencies to help teachers to implement effective transformation (s39).</i>

### **5.5. Summary of questionnaire findings**

Questionnaire data presented that Pra teachers are mostly embracing the changes introduced to the teaching and learning behaviour associated with Pra. As explained in Chapter 4 on the dissemination of the questionnaire, with the presence of the experts from the Ministry of Education officers involved in the implementation and monitoring of the changes in the teaching and learning in the Brunei preschool education, the data offered or noted may be different from when those officers are not present. Referring back to Chapter 4 on the issue of confidentiality, the teachers were asking for verbal assurance from myself on the anonymity of the participants' response and the verbal assurance that the officers will not have direct access to the data. It was necessary for me to provide verbal assurance because, as stated in Chapter 4, research ethics evolved dynamically during the data collection process. It should be stressed that written confidentiality assurance had been provided in the first page of the questionnaire, which is the information sheet of the research. The findings based on response data from the questionnaire showed real tensions and challenges in the processes of change that are happening in Brunei. Emerging key themes are some positives towards the changes, some cautious responses, and teachers being very honest about the difficulties that they are facing. There is still the need for continuous professional development, with in-house training, workshops, and seminars from the Ministry of Education, to prepare teachers to deal with the ongoing changes. Collaboration with other Pra teachers is valued by having a Pra committee from different zone areas, which acts as a support system. The members meet during training, workshops and seminars, in order to discuss and share ideas and find ways to solve any problems faced. The findings and the analysis of the interview and observation data, gathered from the teachers, will illuminate these themes in more detail.

## **5.6. Teachers' interview findings**

### **5.6.1. Introduction**

This section aims to understand teachers' perceptions regarding the changes in the early childhood education curriculum in Brunei. Particular focus is directed towards: i) which aspect of their classroom practice they think they have changed, ii) if changed, how and what have they changed, and iii) in what ways have they made those changes? The analysis will start with presenting details of the four teachers' backgrounds, and findings of key themes from the teachers' interviews.

### **5.7. Main four teachers' backgrounds**

Four government preschool teachers were the main focus for the teachers' observations and interviews in this study. Two of the teachers were untrained early childhood teachers and the other two were trained early childhood teachers. The demographic details of the four teachers interviewed in this study were presented earlier in Table 4.1. The following is a brief background summary before presenting the teachers' interview findings.

#### *5.7.1. Anita (Untrained teacher)*

Anita is 29 years old and has been teaching preschool for six years. She has experienced the preschool system before and during SPN21. Anita has a non-specialised early childhood background, BA Primary Education and for the purpose of this study, she is considered as an untrained early childhood teacher. Anita has 13 children in her class, one of whom has special needs. She has one temporary teacher's assistant, who is a student volunteer waiting for her A-Level results. Anita's class is situated within a specialised building; a bungalow for Pra. It has four classrooms and an open space for activities, kitchen and play area. Anita uses one of the classrooms, open space for activities, kitchen and play area to deliver her teaching.

#### *5.7.2. Hana (Untrained teacher)*

Hana is 54 years old, a senior preschool teacher who has been teaching Pra for 16 years and has experienced the preschool system before and during SPN21. She is an untrained early childhood teacher with a non-specialised early childhood background and a certificate in teaching. Hana has 17 children in her class and one assistant teacher, who

is a parent volunteer. Her class is situated within the primary building and has one classroom to use as her teaching space.

#### *5.7.3. Laila (Trained teacher)*

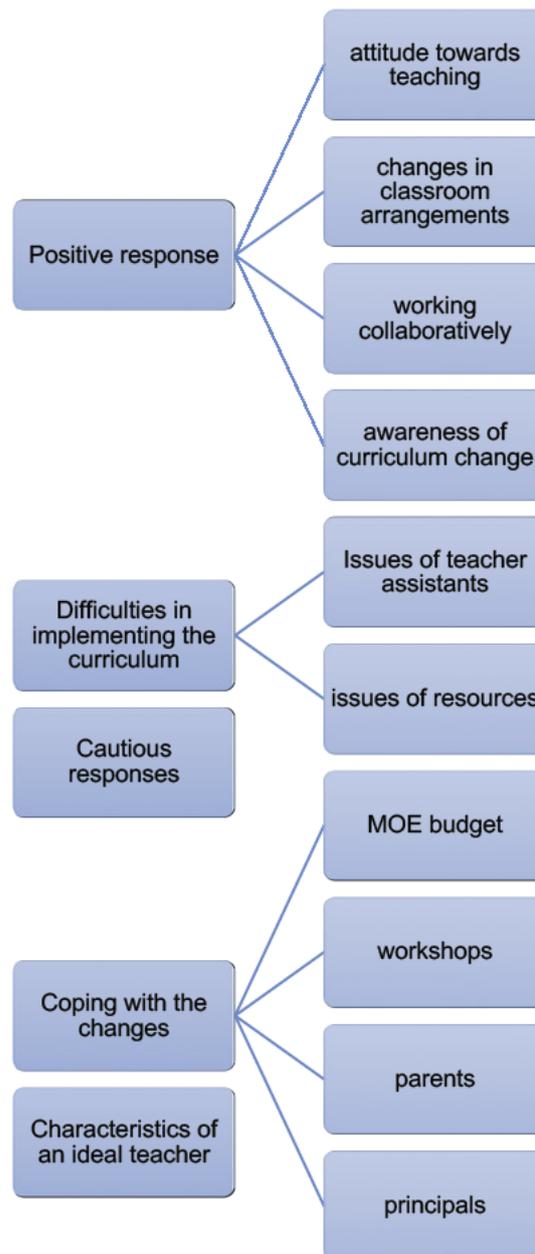
Laila is 45 years old with 9 years of teaching experience. She has experienced the preschool system before and during SPN21. Laila is a specialised early childhood teacher, which makes her a trained teacher in this study, with a B.Ed. in Early Childhood Education. She has 25 children in her class with no special needs child. Laila is assisted by one temporary teacher's assistant who is a student volunteer waiting for his A-Level results. Her class is situated within the primary building and has one classroom to use as her teaching space.

#### *5.7.4. Tina (Trained teacher)*

Tina is 39 years old with 10 years of experience in teaching preschool. She has experienced the preschool system before and during SPN21. Tina is a trained early childhood teacher with a specialised course in B.Ed. in Early Childhood Education. She has 22 children in her class, with one child with special needs. Tina has one temporary teacher's assistant, who is a student volunteer waiting for her O-Level results. Her class is situated within the primary building and she has one classroom to use as her teaching space.

### **5.8. Main themes from teachers' interviews**

The interview findings of the four teachers are guided by five main themes that have emerged from the analysis: 1) positive responses; 2) difficulties in implementing the curriculum; 3) cautious responses; 4) coping with changes; and 5) characteristics of good teachers. The main themes and their sub-themes are presented in Figure 5.11.



**Figure 5.11. Main themes and sub-themes from teachers' interviews**

### **5.9. Positive responses**

The matter of positive responses is the first theme identified from the teachers' interviews. Positive responses here mean positive attitudes towards the educational changes introduced in Pra. Positive responses have four sub-themes as presented above: a) attitude towards teaching, b) changes in classroom arrangements, c) working collaboratively, and d) awareness of curriculum change.

### 5.9.1. Attitude towards teaching

From the research discussion all four teachers reported that their attitudes towards teaching are confident. They were enthusiastic, as well, when telling me how they felt when and after delivering their teaching. Such comments show that the four are enjoying delivering their lessons and are feeling confident. These teachers also do not just settle with their delivered lesson plans as they like to challenge themselves in thinking of new ideas for the activities.

*“Sometimes I can feel that the children understand my teaching and at other times I find it hard to get them to understand. The children need to be prompted. Most of the time I am confident in my teaching and that the children do understand the lesson”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“The first week of introducing a new topic is challenging to get the children to follow the lesson as sometimes their ideas are not many yet. When week two comes, the children by then will already have some ideas. It is not difficult to deliver the lesson”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“I feel happy and Alhamdulillah (All praise and thanks be to Allah) ... Happy... Happy when delivering the lesson! I get to introduce the concept, discuss it with children and help them think broadly by giving them ‘why’ questions”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

*“Enjoyable and confident when teaching because we have prepared and planned the lesson. As teachers, we need to be fast thinkers when delivering our lesson or conducting activities with the children”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“No problem, just at the beginning of becoming a preschool teacher. Not difficult as we need to develop, expand our creative thinking and practice more. I find it fun as it is a learning process for me and I like new things as I have been long in the system”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

When the teachers were asked for their reflections on implementing the changes after teaching the responses from Anita, Laila and Hana suggest that they try their best every time and have never been satisfied with their own teaching. They kept on wanting to find new ways to improve on what they had delivered.

*“Every lesson is not perfect. I try my best but I always try to find out ways to improve in delivering the lesson”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“...thinking of new activities every time for the children looking for ideas, as I do not want to do the same one again for the next one”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“I find the children are not able to learn to share yet and cannot do work as a group. I want to improve on the sharing part by giving out more group work activities for them to try and then select leaders for group work”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

Tina on the other hand, feels happy when reflecting and said:

*“I feel happy when reflecting back on the teaching as children were focused and showed their abilities, being able to discuss with them and I feel happy because we did work together”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

From the interviews, Laila and Tina who are both trained teachers, mentioned their initiatives to improve their learning by using other resources. Laila reported using Malaysian preschool reference books and following Malaysian preschool blogs. Tina uses the internet and Google to help explain to the children, especially when asked about, current affairs to express information in the simplest way.

*“I use Malaysian preschool reference books and follow Malaysian preschool blogs to help me think of ideas for the children’s activities”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“Children like to ask me about current issue. An example is when they ask me about the plane crash incident, MH370. I use the internet and Google it to show the map of the destination and explain it in a way they can understand”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

#### 5.9.2. Changes in classroom arrangements

Teachers are explaining here how their classroom arrangements have changed. All four teachers mentioned that they kept changing their classroom arrangements accordingly.

*“I always have different settings than earlier in the year. Then, I have the children sit in smaller groups to know their ability then I change again to mixed ability grouping, so the seating arrangements in my class keeps changing”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“I changed it every year before receiving the new kids. I changed from having two learning corners and am now having three”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“I changed everything. I set up project work area, bag area, shoe rack area, table layout changed too”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“I changed accordingly to the needs. For example, we are going to have a new reading programme soon and there are lots of new books coming in already. I am waiting for bookshelves to arrive and then I will position them to allow a flow for children to go to the shelf to get book and read. I also replaced the carpet area and adjust the arrangements to cater to big number of children during our mat time. I like it”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

### 5.9.3. Working collaboratively

It is evident from the interview that all four teachers were working collaboratively with other preschool teachers in preparing their lesson plans. They mentioned that they discuss the themes and plan the activities together.

*“Discussion with other teachers to prepare the lesson”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

*“By working collaboratively with other preschool teachers”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“Although I have been teaching for 16 years, I always look for other ways to discuss and plan the lesson”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“I do it by having discussions with teachers from our school zones” (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

Although it seems that these teachers are always working collaboratively, Anita revealed that they were active in the beginning, but they are still waiting for the next collaborative effort.

*“In the beginning, there were lots of active discussions on it and we sit together planning, nowadays there isn't one yet”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

### 5.9.4. Awareness of curriculum change

From the research discussion, the teachers have shown and explained their awareness of the curriculum changes. They mentioned what the Pra curriculum was like before SPN21, their understanding of the current Pra curriculum, agreement that there are changes in the Pra curriculum and how those changes have altered the roles of the Pra teachers.

Hana highlighted that before SPN21, there was no showcase and the curriculum for numeracy only covered from 1-10.

*“There wasn't any showcase before SPN21. It is good to have the showcase as parents love it”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“Before SPN21, the children were required to know, recognise and count from 1-10. Now, it has changed from 1-20”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

All four teachers have an understanding of what the Pra curriculum is about. They mentioned some of the teaching approaches and how it is oriented towards a child-centred approach.

*“The curriculum uses the thematic approach and now the project approach is introduced which is not yet included in the curriculum itself”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“The learning emphasis is reading, writing, counting, exploring the environment around us like early science and developing their creativity through imagination”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“The activities introduced should aim to develop the children to be confident, creative thinkers, child-centred and uses the theme ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ approach”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“It is a foundation preparing children for Year One. Learning is an integration of subjects. Teaching is more towards playing, enjoy, relax and nurturing the curiosity of the child”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

All four teachers are in agreement that there are changes to the preschool curriculum.

Three of the teachers mentioned that the project approach is new.

*“Yes, the project approach is new. It is also not included yet in the curriculum although it is one of the successful changes along with showcase”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“Integration is new to me and the project approach. Before it was thematically by subjects, now it is integration across subjects”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“I find the project approach, classroom arrangement, showcase and integration are the changes made to the curriculum. The emphasis is more on being a confident speaker, creative thinking and problem solvers”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

Meanwhile, one teacher mentioned that there are not that many changes, although she is acknowledging that there are some. She mentioned that the rest of the changes are not new to her.

*“Yes, it does change, we must follow what is given from the scheme of work and from the teaching that needs to be used from the curriculum; we have to accept the changes although before we already have SPN21. For example, before this there was no early science as a subject, actually early science is already integrated with the Malay language subject but now it is emphasised. Before, we have drawing, colouring, story-telling, and now the names are changed to aesthetics and creativity. Children nowadays are given more practical, hands-on activities in their learning compared to the children before. So, children are able to develop further in terms of their aesthetics and creativity. Children nowadays are given the freedom to speak, we give them the opportunity to speak and from there we can help them with the correct usage of the standard Malay language”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“A few changes only, not much. The project approach is new”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

When asked whether the role of the teachers has changed with the implementation of the preschool changes in teaching and learning, Anita explained that there is no change and her role is as a facilitator.

*“There is no change of the teacher’s role as we still act as a guide to the child. We still focus on being child-centred; they make something for themselves, and they do something for themselves. So, our role is as a facilitator”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

This contradicts Laila’s response, who thinks that her role has changed to become a facilitator. She perceives her new role as prompting questions and providing free choice of activities to the children.

*“Yes. Our role changes. We think for activities that makes the children think and make them more engaged and brave. Our role as teachers turn as facilitators we ask them questions where we give them free choices”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

## **5.10. Difficulties in implementing the curriculum**

The second theme that emerged from the teachers’ interviews relates to the difficulties the teachers faced in implementing the curriculum. Issues of teachers’ assistants and resources are further presented below.

### *5.10.1. Issues of teachers’ assistants*

Teacher assistants have also been recently introduced into the preschool system. These assistants are volunteer O-level or A-level students who are waiting for their results to further their studies or take jobs. Hence, the post is temporary and they can opt out at anytime. The findings showed that Anita, Laila and Tina had one teacher assistant each; most of them do not stay longer than six months. As for Hana, she had volunteering parents as her teacher assistants. She has one teacher’s assistant to help her throughout the day and if this parent cannot make it, she has other parents who are glad to volunteer.

According to the four teachers, they are using their teachers’ assistants by giving them the role to assist children in giving out work, looking after the children’s safety, including restroom breaks, assisting with phonics when required and helping children who need more attention.

Due to the volunteering scope given to the volunteers, the assistants do not usually stay long. Laila reported that her assistant was with her for a month only, at the start of the year, to help with transition. Tina is also having the same dilemma of not having a teacher's assistant on a regular basis, as hers is not present every day. As for Anita, her assistants are helpful and her only issue about them is their temporary service.

*“Only for a month in the beginning of the new term. Now they have secured a job and the other one has a scholarship to further her studies”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“Not there every day, they come and go as they like, so I do not depend on them as I do not want to get used to the temporary help”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

*“They are student volunteers waiting for their exam results and so they do not stay long”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

Anita is faced with the challenge of delivering the lesson to a class including a child with special needs who requires a lot of her attention; at the same time, she has no teacher assistant to help her. She is struggling to attend to the rest of the children and the Special Education Needs Assistant (SENA) cannot help her yet until the child's parents declare their consent. This situation is similar to Hana's, who is also trying to understand the behaviour of the children with special needs in her class. However, in her case she has a teacher's assistant.

*“Delivering the lesson is OK except when there are children with special needs. They need more attention but at the same time, I need to look after the other children and this issue affects them as well. Hopefully, slowly, I can manage it with the SENNA teacher. The challenge is my teacher assistant left and SENNA teacher cannot cater to the child yet without the parents willing to accept and consent”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

Laila, who is a trained teacher, is challenged with creating a conducive classroom organisation to make the learning more fun.

*“I am challenged when it comes to classroom organisation on how to make it conducive; a learning class to do activities with the children. By learning class I mean is to make them like the class to feel like home so they can enjoy their learning. I am thankful to have temporary teacher assistant to assist in handling the children, because without them it is challenging”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

Tina is challenged with the temporary teacher assistants and raised the issue of safety. She does not provide sand play in her activities to avoid being blamed if anything

negative happens, as she cannot monitor them all. She also shared that her non-teaching period is sometimes used to relieve her class automatically, if the special lessons *Ugama* (Islamic Religious Knowledge) and/or P.E (Physical Education) teachers are absent.

*“Alhamdulillah OK. Syukur Alhamdulillah so far. My challenge is only having temporary teachers’ assistants. Now they have left, I need some assistance with teaching activities especially the reading programme to help monitor children’s reading progress. This is also why I do not have sand play activities as I am concerned with the safety of the children and not enough adults to help with monitoring. I also become the relief class teacher automatically, when the Ugama teacher or the P.E. teacher is not there”.* (T-Tina-I-Trained)

Indirectly, both the trained and untrained teachers are saying that the issue of temporary teachers’ assistants does greatly affect them but has contributed to the factors that challenged them when implementing their lessons.

While these teachers are facing issues of no teachers’ assistants, Hana has the advantage that her assistant (a parent volunteer) is always there. She mentioned that in return for the volunteers’ service, the school acknowledges her teacher assistants by rewarding them with gifts on teachers’ day, certificate for volunteering, and also access to any school extra- curricular activities.

*“The school rewards the volunteering parents as teacher assistants with teachers’ day gifts, certificate, and access to ECA school activities”.* (T-Hana-I-Untrained)

Furthermore, Laila’s research discussion revealed that the children were also part of her challenges in implementing the change.

*“Classroom change, sometimes children can say my classroom is always the same”.* (T-Laila-I-Trained)

#### 5.10.2. Issues of resources

Hana expressed that she did not find resources were a challenge.

*“Resources for everyday are enough for me. It is enough, it depends on the creativity of the teacher on how to get more resources but so far it is enough”.* (T-Hana-I-Untrained)

Laila and Hana suggested the need for more resources on book references for implementing the curriculum, specifically for each topic.

*“I would like to suggest for the Curriculum Department, to provide more book references on how to conduct activities or sample activities for topics in the curriculum”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“Curriculum Department to provide topical charts to guide us for each topic”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“We still lack resources and limited budget allocations for our class. We need more reference books and on materials like stationeries for the children”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

Tina on the other hand, shared that when she does not have enough budget from the school for her resources, she buys them herself, paying out of her own pocket.

*“If I don’t have the resources that I need, I buy them. We do have a Pra budget but we use it on everyday stationeries like glue, pencils, coloured pencils and if the plasticine is not enough, I buy more”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

### **5.11. Cautious responses**

Hana, Anita, Tina and Laila all reported that they are “OK” and having “No problem” in implementing the changes. From the excerpts below, it is clear that they are being cautious and polite, although they are faced with challenges.

*“No problem just at the beginning of becoming a preschool teacher and untrained in early childhood. It is not difficult after many years of teaching now, we need to develop, expand, and practice more. I find it fun as it is a learning process for me and I like new things as I have been long in the system”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“Managing the behaviour of children with special needs creates a challenge for me in the classroom. I want to help them too but I need to learn how to. So far I have tried several activities to cater to them and try to observe their behaviour and understand to seek for progress”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“I do not have any problem just wanting to make activities that I plan for the children to be more creative. Sometimes, I have done the same thing so for this year I discuss and exchange ideas with other teachers. I have not received any reference books yet from the Curriculum Department and am still waiting as my friends said it is a good book to refer to when we are out of ideas”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

Anita revealed that initially the changes were stressful for her.

*“From my experience, the first time there were changes, it was stressful, I don’t know how to manage the different learning corners in the class. I went to my principal or ECCE people for help when they were present at the workshop.” (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

## 5.12. Coping with the changes

All four teachers mentioned that the support given from the Ministry of Education, such as budget and workshops, had helped the teachers in overcoming their challenges.

### 5.12.1. MOE budget

The Ministry of Education has provided financial support to facilitate the implementation of change, as mentioned by Hana and Anita. The support was in the Pra budget, to buy materials that were needed for the classroom, from furniture to learning materials such as stationeries for the children.

*“The big one is the setting up of the different learning corners in class, resources from the Pra budget to use for the classroom and to prepare teaching materials. Recently, we have the ECCE Unit, Ministry of Education, providing us with resources like the new tables and chairs”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*“Material resources from the government budget to buy stationeries for the children, materials for the lesson. It is less of a burden on us with that budget provided”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

### 5.12.2. Workshops

Workshops provided by the Ministry of Education supported the teachers as they were trying to implement the curriculum changes.

*“Given workshops, seminars and then visits to schools that have implemented the changes”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*Training like workshops also provides as resource. It helps us to know, learn what to do. It is a lot of work but in the end, we see the progress”. (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*“Training especially for all the transformations, like learning how to apply the lessons with the activities, capacity training, we were trained and explained the Project approach, mind mapping, sharing sessions on how to conduct activities and see how other teachers implement it”. (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*“By attending the workshops and trying to implement change”. (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

Meanwhile, Anita suggested the professional development should be continuous.

*“Yes, the workshops are enough as long as it is continuous not just stop it after 2-3 months and then to continue”.*

On the other hand, Hana mentioned that when she was faced with difficulty she does not just wait for the workshops. Instead she will approach the Pra committee first, and if they were not available, then she will approach the ECCE Unit to assist her. This example is similar with Anita's response.

*"In case if there is any difficulty, or challenges, I will discuss it with other Pra teachers, if not I go to the Pra committee zone group or lastly the ECCE Unit to help me. They are helpful especially the curriculum and ECCE Unit". (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*"I go to my principal or the ECCE people when they were present at the workshop. Sometimes I asked them personally, I was doing this and this and there is still something missing". (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

### 5.12.3. Parents

The teachers explained that all of them had positive support from parents. Parents are seen to be involved with their children's learning by attending the showcase, during which the children explained their work. There is a similarity between the four teachers, where they used the word "positive" from their responses.

*"Parents are supportive. They gave positive feedback with the showcase and they like that they are welcome to see their child's work" (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

*"Positive support from the parents. Lots of them came for the showcase". (T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

*"They are positive about the changes and very supportive. They help with their child's activities, and bring in the things needed from home to class. Parents do not mind that they are out of work for a short time just to come and see their children's work". (T-Laila-I-Trained)*

*"Positive support. There were a lot of parents during the showcase and the children were excited when they explained their work to their parents". (T-Tina-I-Trained)*

Hana's findings showed parents were supportive towards the showcase but interfered by requesting their child should not to be moved to a different class.

*"Parents interfered not wanting their children to be moved classes every term as it upsets the children". ((T-Hana-I-Untrained)*

### 5.12.4. Principals

Responses from all four teachers indicate their principals are aware of the changes and provided them the support by allocating bigger rooms, air conditioning, and access to a budget. Anita revealed her principal was enthusiastic towards the change and would

come to assist her in the class when she had free time. The four teachers also have the support of their colleagues in the school. Hana and Laila were provided with air-conditioning in their classrooms by their principals. In Brunei government schools, not all classrooms are equipped with air conditioning, although typically all classrooms have a ceiling fan. The Pra classes were allocated budgets for air conditioners to make the classroom comfortable for the children.

*“The principal is very enthusiastic. Before there was a wall which made the room smaller, she made arrangements to remove it to make more space for the lesson area. When she has free time, she comes and helps; everybody in the school is working together”.* (T-Anita-I-Untrained)

*“Supportive towards the change and provided with air-cond in the classroom”.* (T-Hana-I-Untrained)

*“Provided supplies for work, and new tables for the children. Before my class is small and now she has moved me to a bigger class with air-con”.* (T-Laila-I-Trained)

*“The principal gave budget to beautify the class. Before this the class looks dull but after repainting, it looks much better”.* (T-Tina-I-Trained)

### **5.13. Characteristics of an ideal teacher**

The teachers were asked about their perception of the characteristics of the ideal preschool teacher to meet the required changes. Both Hana and Tina mentioned one of the characteristics is being patient.

*“Patient, knowledgeable and skillful in teaching to attract children’s attention, cheerful, loves to smile, responsible towards children’s education and safety”.* (T-Hana-I-Untrained)

*“Patient, try to do the best, high spirit and motivated, generous if not, the teacher will find it difficult to buy school supplies using her own money”.* (T-Tina-I-Trained)

*“Willingness to work, open to changes, willingness to attend workshops and apply the knowledge to her practice”.* (T-Laila-I-Trained)

Anita brought in her experience in helping out a teacher who was stressed by the changes and reflects on that case to think of the ideal preschool teacher.

*“The main thing is to be active. Active and open to changes as sometimes one can be negative towards the change. Eager to come to workshops and see it as an eye opener for problems that we are facing. Like when asked to implement, the negative thinking teachers will not want to try the changes as they kept saying that cannot work as they have experienced it. But, I have experienced it with one of the teachers that when we have explained and showed them how*

*then slowly they get it. I can even hear her say, “Oh, it is like this. This is easy...” So, I think we need to realize that we need to be prepared that there will be changes. In education, we need to follow the changes for the children, there’s a lot of changes going on with this generation, so they need to be open to changes and then creative. Creative in exploring what to change, creative to apply it in the classroom”. (T-Anita-I-Untrained)*

#### **5.14. Summary of teachers’ interview findings**

This section, on the teachers’ interview findings, has presented five themes: 1) positive responses; 2) difficulties in implementing the new curriculum; 3) cautious responses; 4) coping with changes; and 5) characteristics of good teachers. The interview findings have provided insights indicating the teachers are having a mixture of responses towards the changes implemented in Pra. They were all positive towards the changes, with some being cautious to the changes and some being honest by explaining their challenges in facing those changes in Pra. These threads of teachers’ responses will then be merged with the observation findings in the next section of this chapter. The teachers’ interview findings and the findings from observing teachers in action will then provide a further understanding of how the teachers’ perceptions towards the changes are enacted in practice.

## **5.15. Findings from observing teachers in action**

### **5.15.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to analyse the data collected from the four government preschool classroom observations. This work reports on the findings from the teachers specifically for research question three: *“How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, organising the environment, and implementing the curriculum?”*

This section aims to understand how teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, organising the environment, and implementing the curriculum. It will also look at what teachers’ perceptions are on the changes: i) which aspects of their classroom practice they think they have changed, ii) if so how, and what have they changed, and iii) in what ways have they made those changes. In other words, the findings here will portray how the teachers translate policy into practice in their schools, and particularly their classrooms.

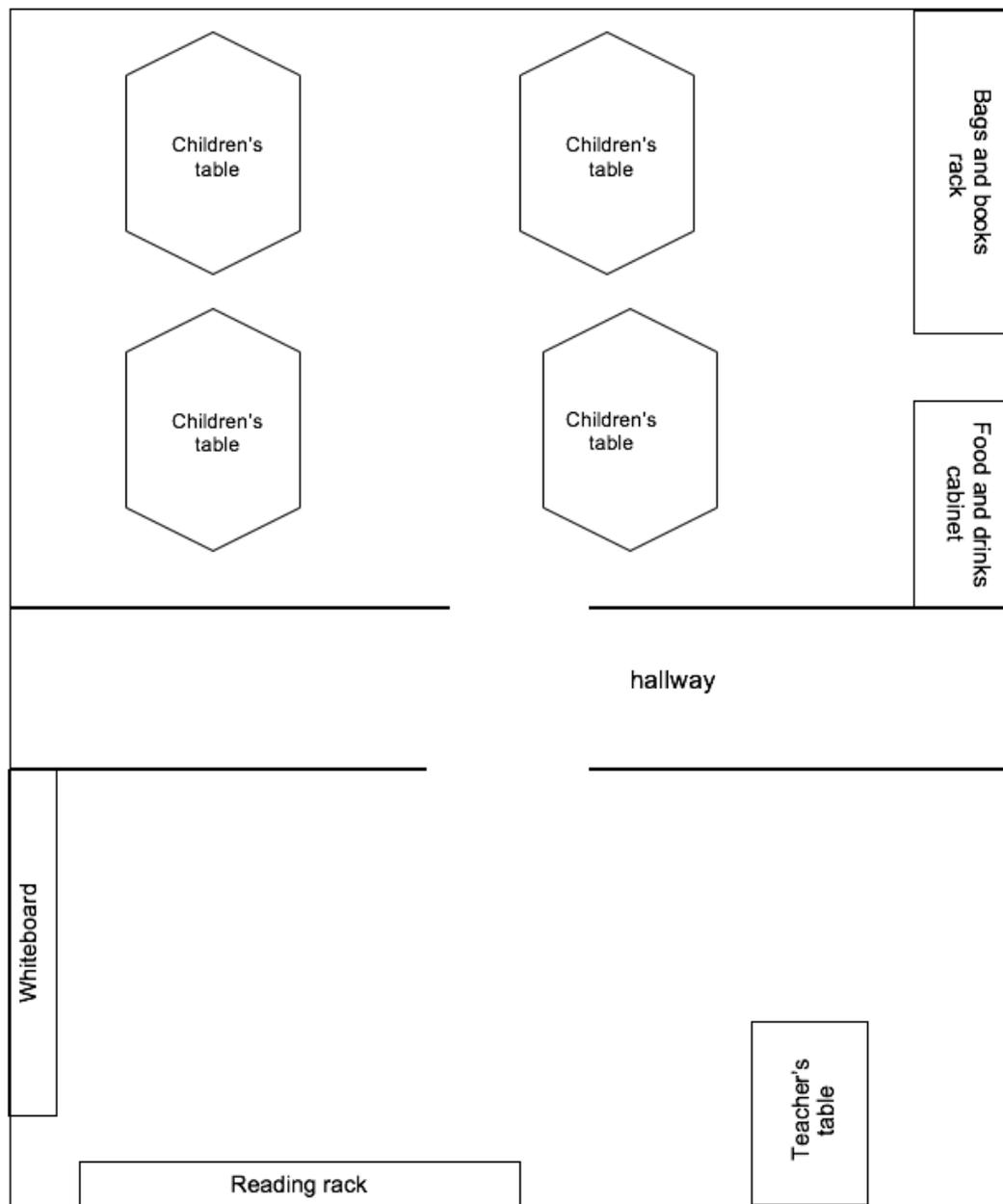
Each section will start with details of the four teachers’ classroom layouts and findings of key themes from observing the teachers in their classrooms. Observations have been carried out for about three weeks per teacher, with seven lessons observed; each with a duration of one hour per lesson. Observations were made of four government preschool teachers, totalling 28 lessons over 28 hours.

## **5.16. Anita (Untrained teacher)**

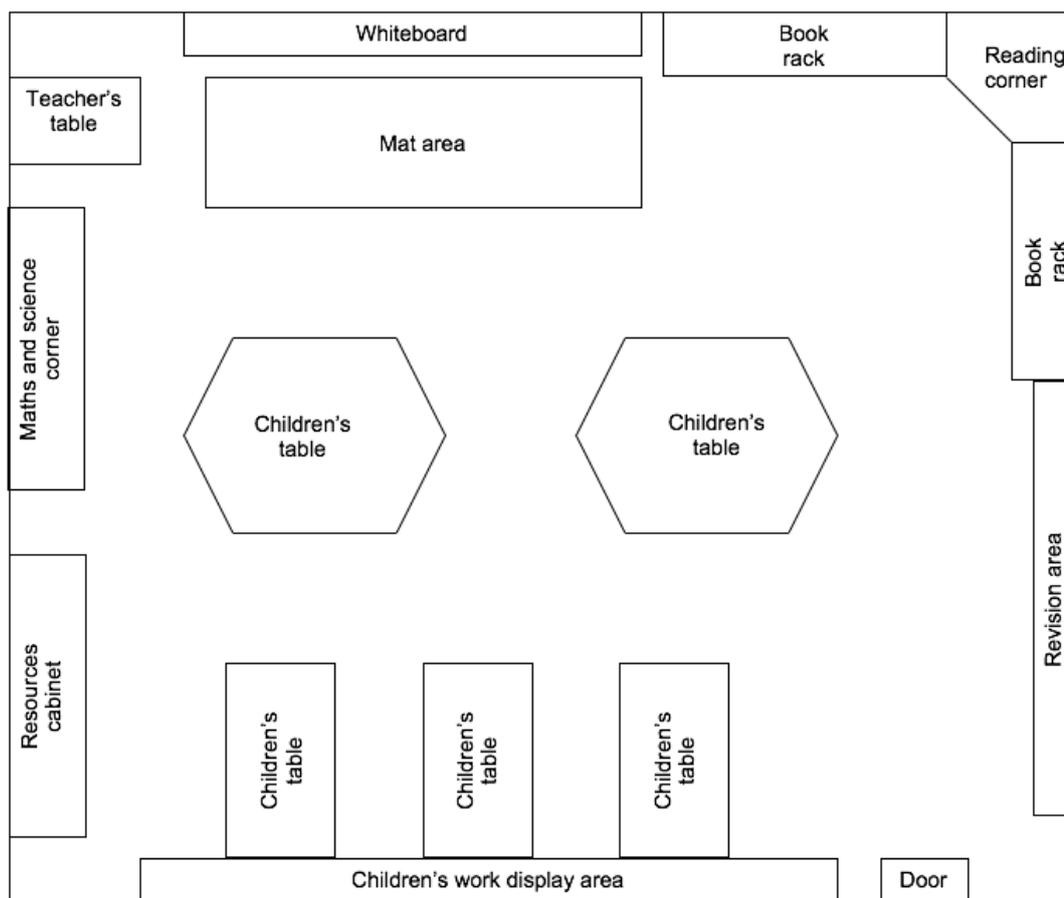
### *5.16.1. Classroom layout*

Anita’s class is situated within a specialised building; a bungalow for Pra. It had four classrooms and an open space for activities, kitchen and play area. Anita used one of the classrooms, open space for activities, kitchen and play area to deliver her teaching. Figure 5.12 and Figure 5.13 below show Anita’s classroom before and after the introduction of the changes. Figure 5.12 shows Anita’s classroom was divided into two rooms before the transformation; there were no other learning corners except for the reading rack. Figure 5.13 showed how Anita’s classroom has changed to follow the

initiated changes in Pra teaching and learning. There are now the additions of a mat area, maths and science learning corner, reading corner, and children's work display area.



**Figure 5.12. Anita's classroom layout before transformation**



**Figure 5.13. Anita's classroom layout after transformation**

#### 5.16.2. Access to resources

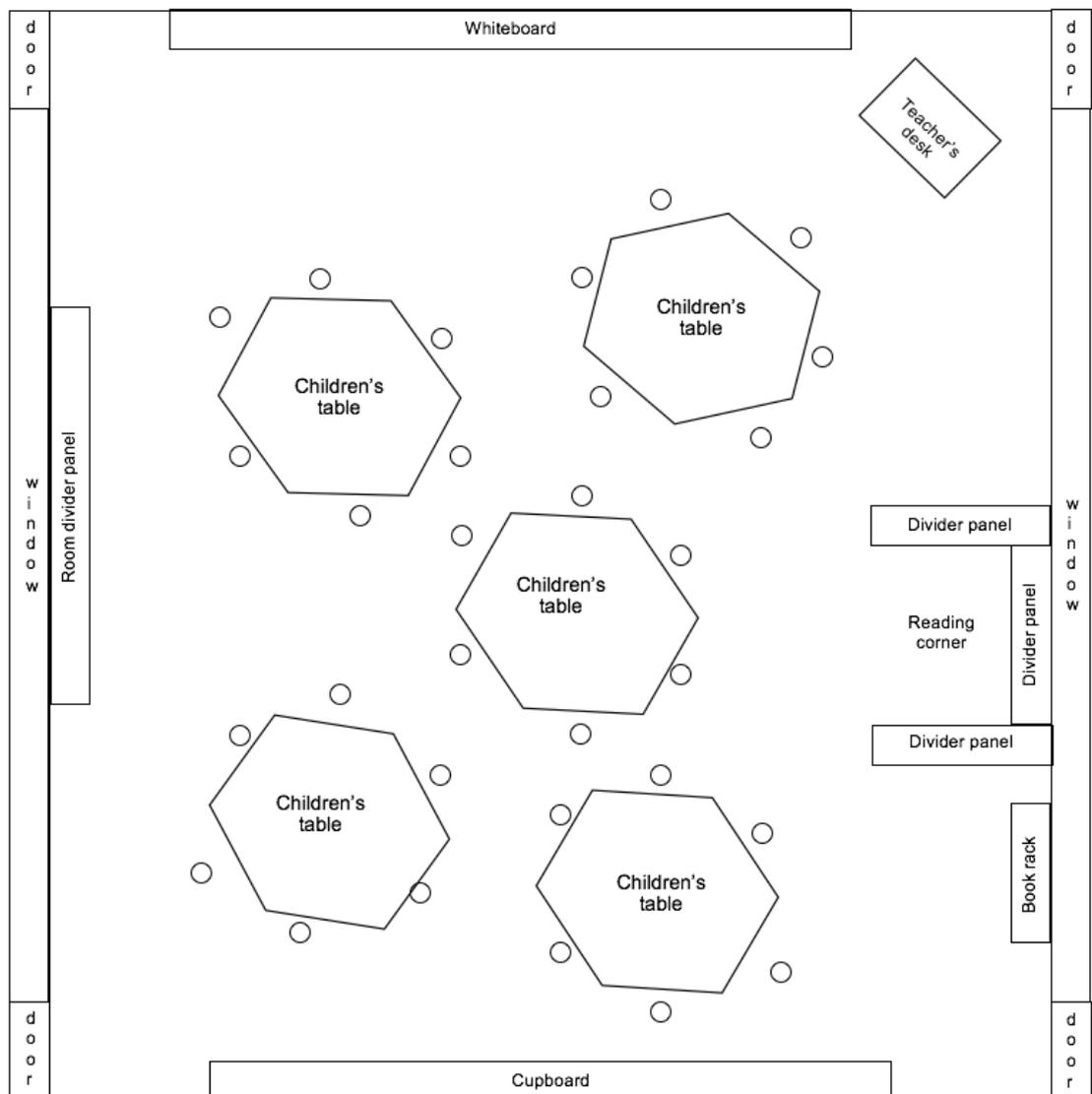
As observed from Anita's class, the children have free access to all the learning corners. They were observed freely going to the resources cabinet to use any of the stationeries available, without the need to ask for Anita's permission. The children were also observed moving to the reading corner when they have finished their given tasks. As observed from the seven observations, it was part of the children's routine to go the reading corner when they have finished their work. The children were observed sharing books together or reading the book themselves. Therefore, Anita's resources area and learning corners were seen to be fully utilised by the children.

### 5.17. Hana (Untrained teacher)

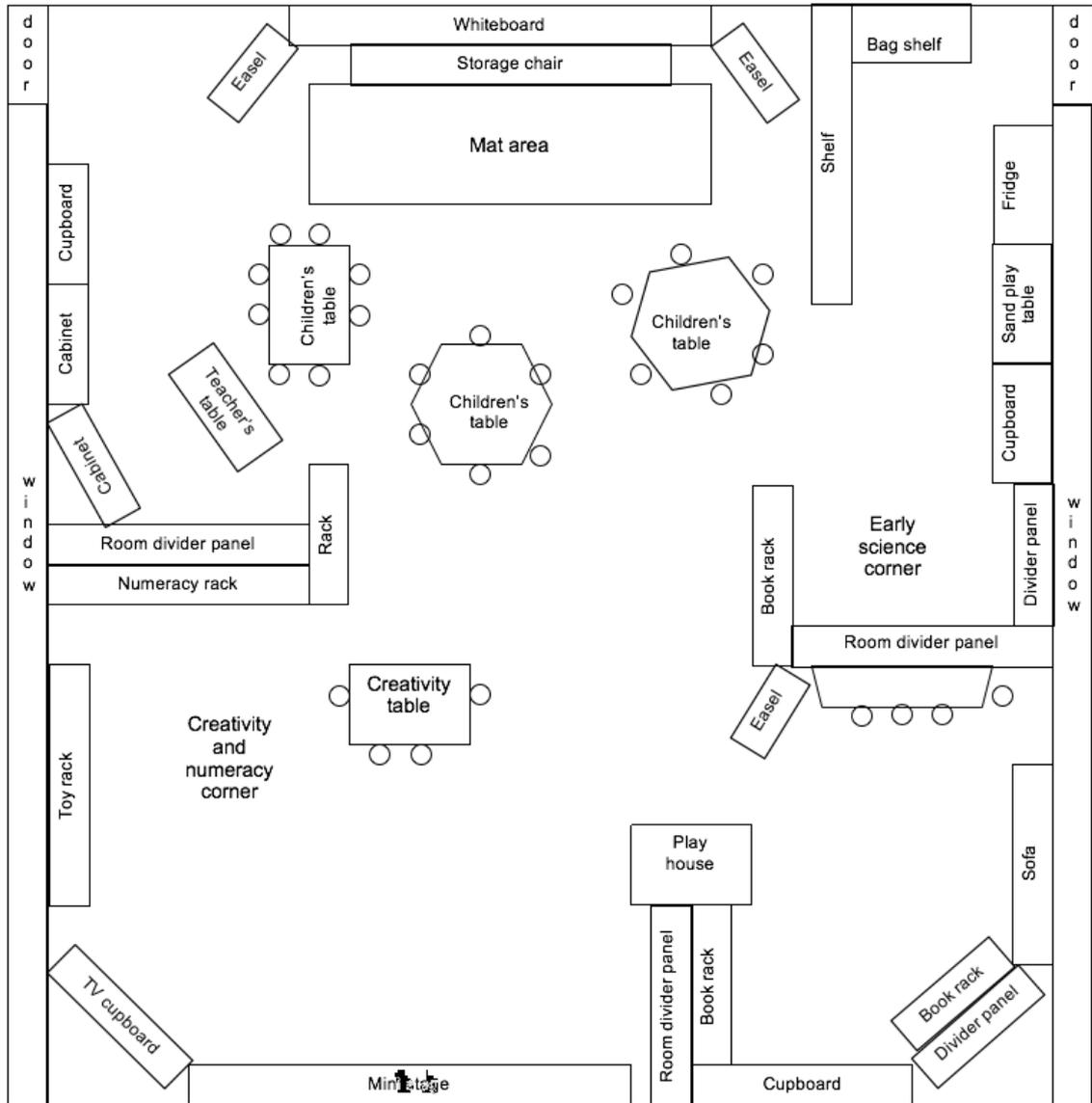
#### 5.17.1. Classroom layout

Hana's class was situated within the primary building and had one classroom to use as her teaching space. Figure 5.14 and Figure 5.15 show Hana's classroom layout before and after transformation respectively. Before SPN21, Hana's class had a reading corner

only. After the implementation of SPN21, and after the transformation initiated from the ECCE Unit, Hana’s classroom had more learning corners such as: a) an early science corner, b) creativity and numeracy corner, c) mini stage/theatre, than it did before. She also added more resources to make her classroom conducive, like having a sofa for her reading corner, TV corner and a play house. Hana displayed her children’s work around the class. Having a mat area was also new to her classroom layout with a toy rack and numeracy rack. She had a sand play area inside her classroom. Hana’s classroom layout after the transformation shows evidence that she is embracing the changes introduced.



**Figure 5.14. Hana’s classroom layout before transformation**



**Figure 5.15. Hana's classroom layout after transformation**

*5.17.2. Access to resources*

As observed, the children in her class were free to use any of the materials they needed from the learning corners. During most of my observations, when the children finish their tasks, they were free to go to the learning corners that they like. It was observed that they do this after telling their teacher they have finished their given written task. Some children will be sharing a book, reading and listening to each other, some discussing what the book is about, while others are busy playing with the toys at the toy area. The children then were seen tidying up the resources that they have used, without being asked to do so.

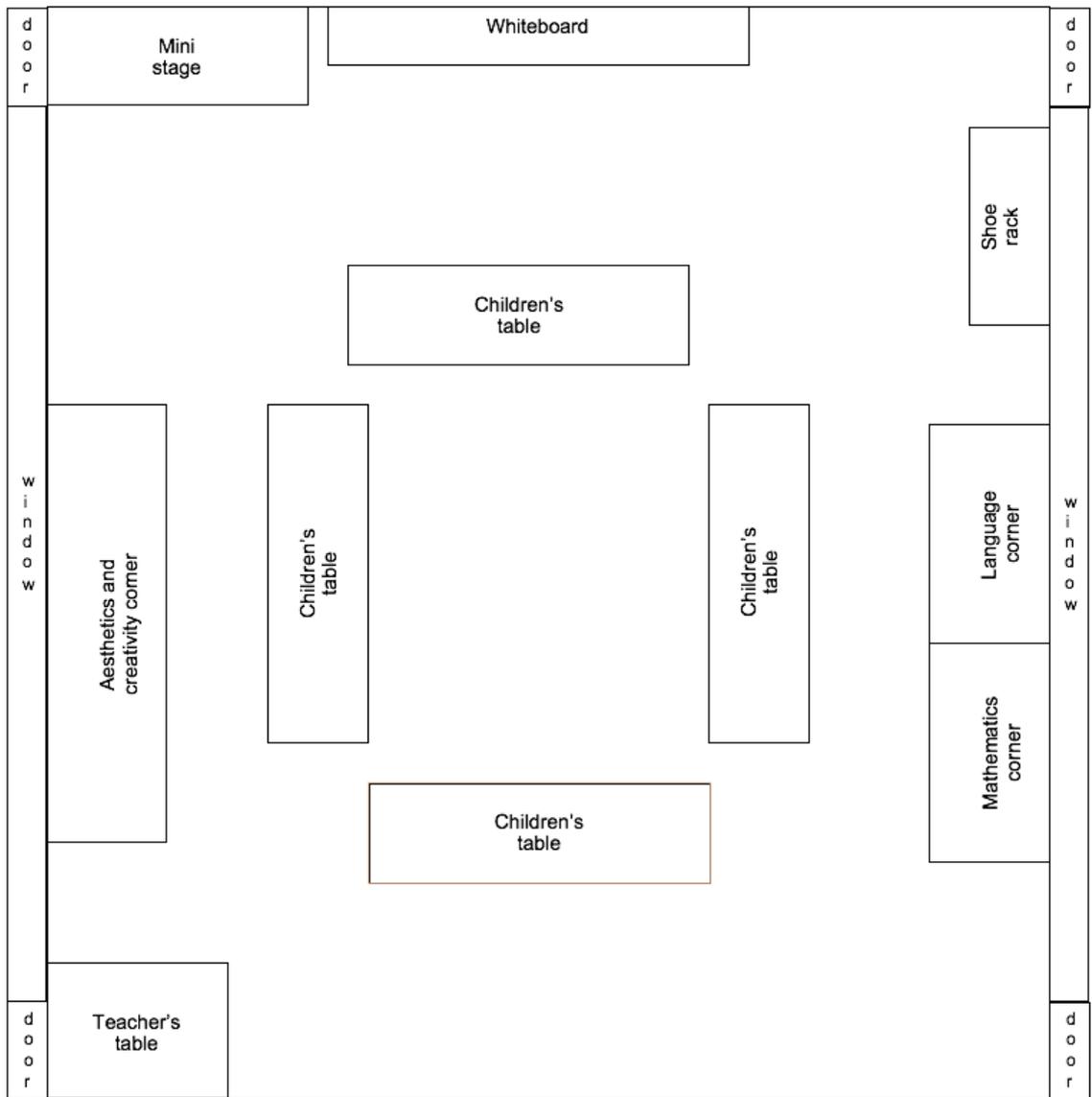
### *5.17.3. Hana and her teacher assistant*

Having a parent volunteer as her assistant has given Hana an advantage when compared to the other teachers in this study. She was observed having the same parent volunteer, named Fitriah, in her class throughout my observation sessions. Hana mentioned that if Fitriah was unable to make it, she has other parents who were willing to come in and help. All she needed to do was to give them a ring. This is very rare and unique in the Brunei context. Fitriah had been assisting Hana for more than five years already. From my observation, she knew what to do when it comes to assisting the lesson. She was usually briefed before the lesson on the day's task and she was seen working well and cooperatively, assisting any children who were in need, managing children when they were at the mat area, and also assisting children to the restroom. Her interaction with the children mirrored Hana's attitude towards the children and how she managed the lesson.

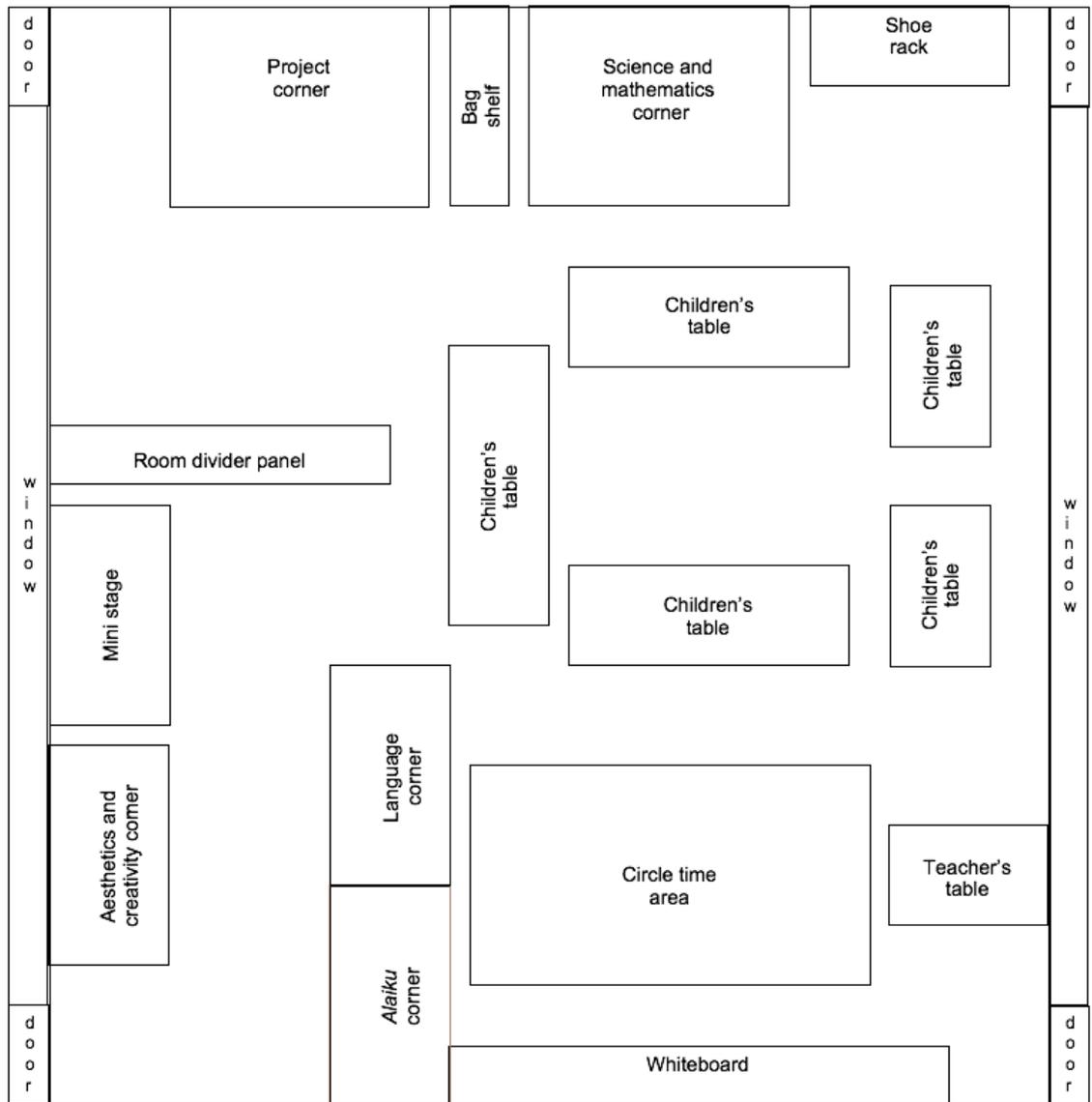
## **5.18. Laila (Trained teacher)**

### *5.18.1. Classroom layout*

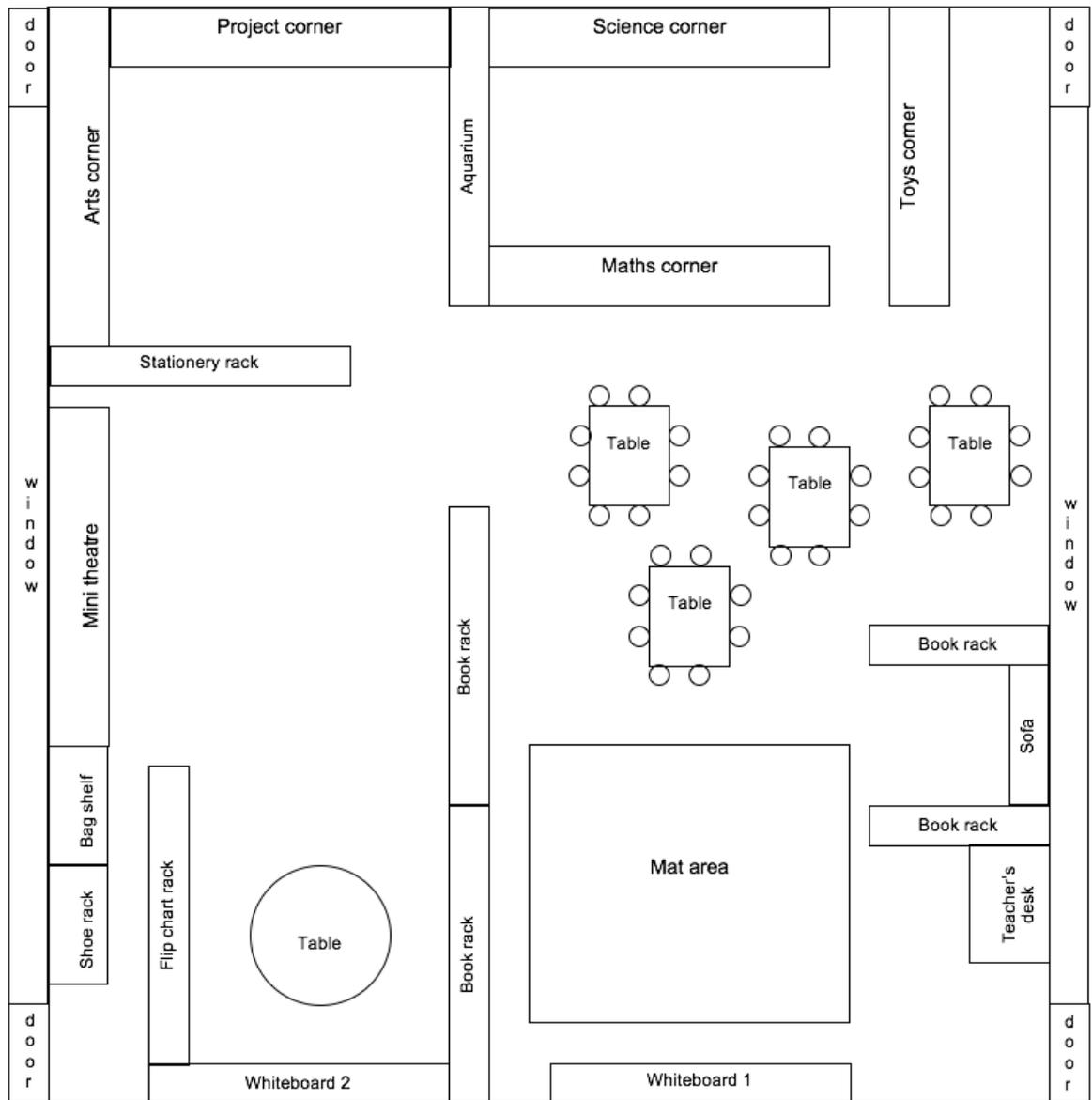
Laila's class was situated within the primary building and she had one classroom to use as her teaching space. Figure 5.16 and Figure 5.17 below show Laila's classroom before and after the transformation respectively. When I came in to observe, Laila was at the 'after transformation' layout and was seen as still organising her classroom setting. She changed her classroom organisation on my third day of observation, hence the new third classroom layout in Figure 5.18 below. Figure 5.16 showed Laila had already arranged her class with learning corners such as the aesthetics and creativity corner, mathematics corner, language corner and a mini stage for drama. Figure 5.17 showed that Laila was still in a state of rearranging her class, and the traffic flow seemed blocked and not free to move about with the way the tables were arranged. She realised that from our discussion when I asked her what happened that made her change. She reorganised the traffic flow in her class, as seen in Figure 5.18. It was observed that she added the toy corner, project corner, science corner, an aquarium, flip chart rack and a bigger mat area compared to the layout before the transformation.



**Figure 5.16. Laila's classroom layout before transformation**



**Figure 5.17. Laila's classroom layout after transformation**



**Figure 5.18. Laila’s new classroom layout from third observation onwards (with enhanced ‘traffic flow’)**

*5.18.2. Access to resources*

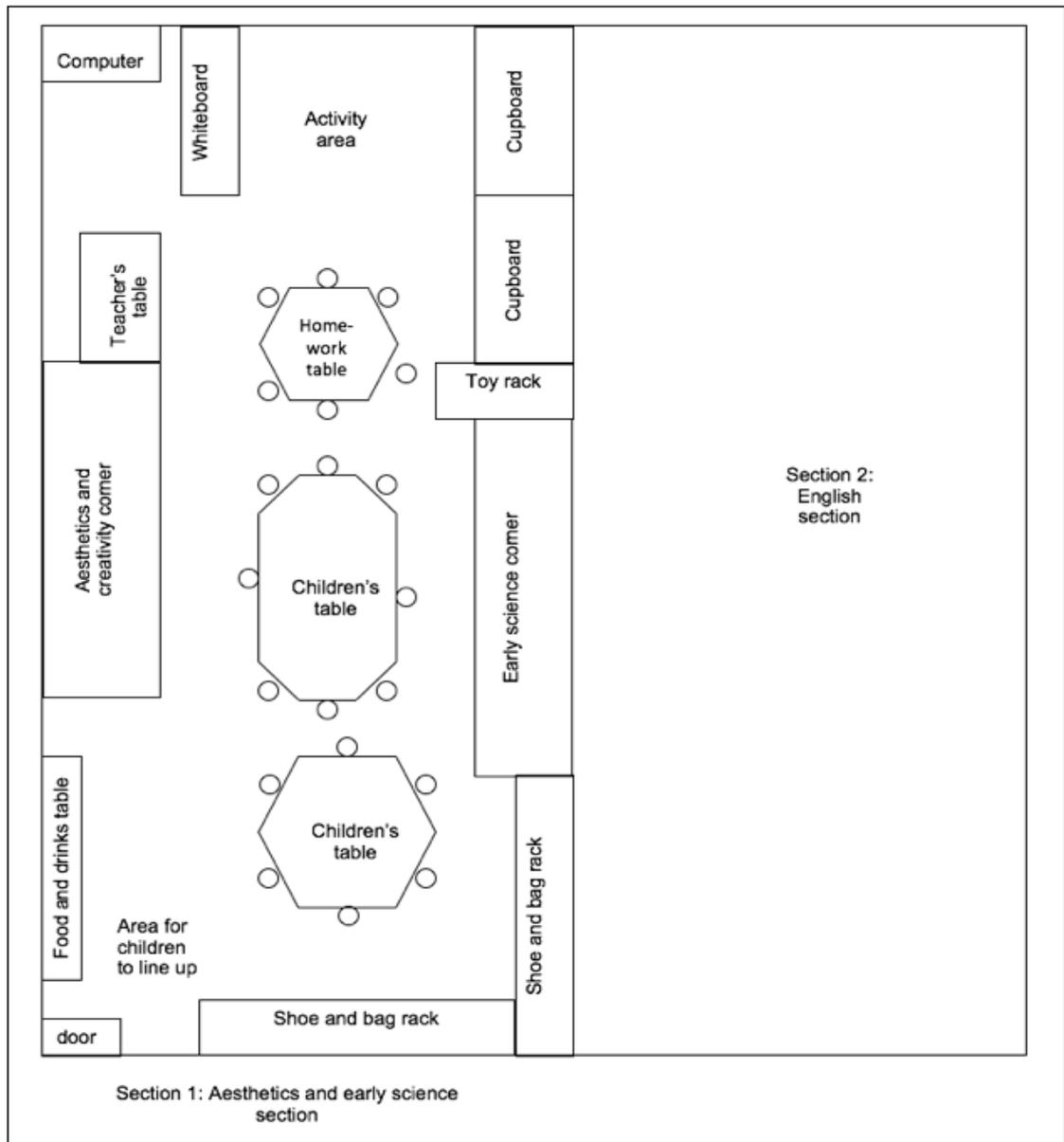
The children were seen having access to the resources and moving freely to use the stationeries.

**5.19. Tina (Trained teacher)**

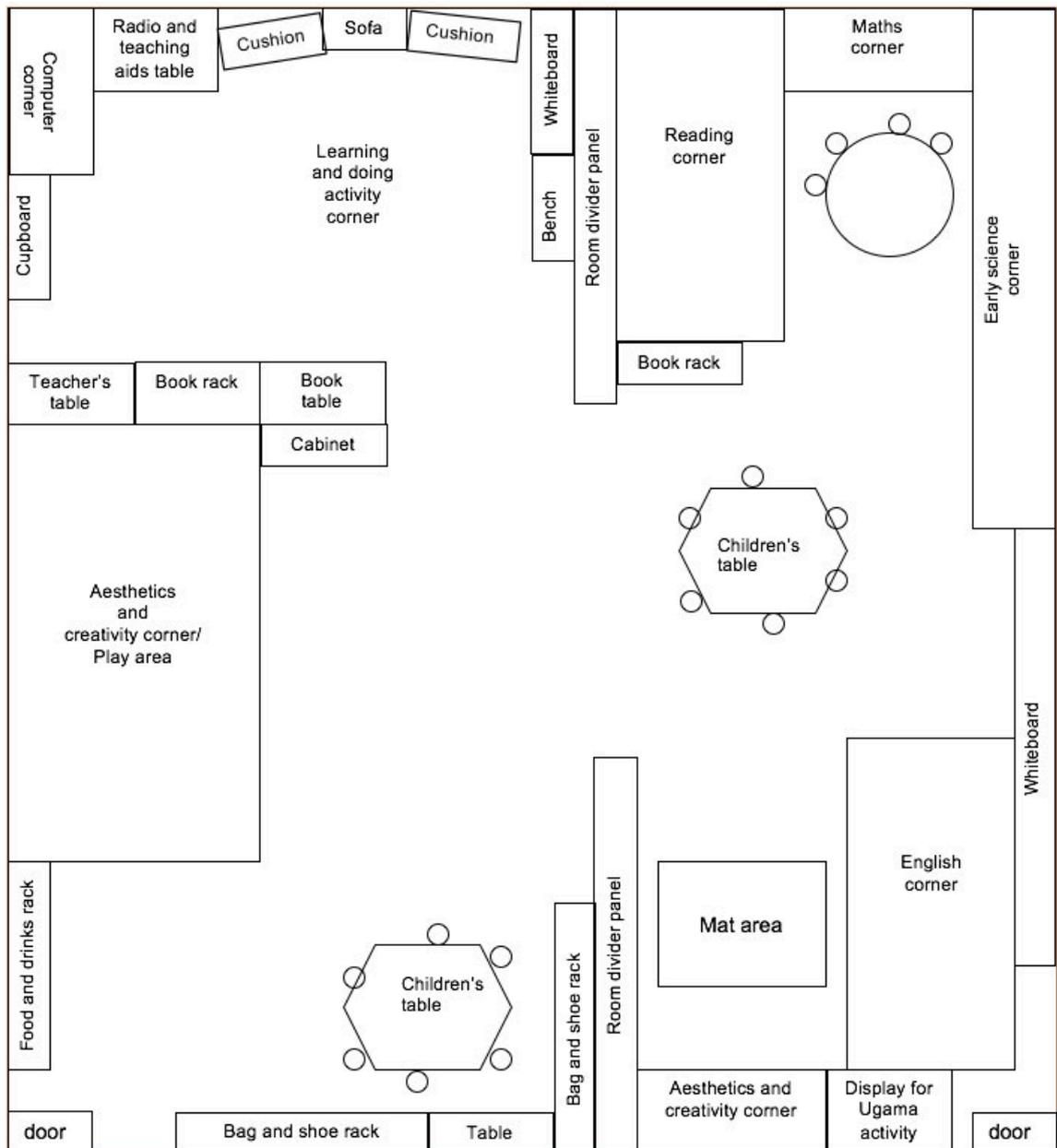
*5.19.1. Classroom layout*

Tina’s class is situated within the primary building; she had one classroom to use as her teaching space. Figure 5.19 shows Tina’s class before the transformation. Her class had some learning corners even before the transformation. She divided her class space into two to give way for the English teacher to use that space. They were not sharing the

classroom space as explained by Tina as that was how the English teacher wanted it to be. Figure 5.20 shows Tina's class after the transformation. Tina has made use of the class area and added learning by creating an activity corner, maths corner and making a bigger space for children to do activities, when compared to before the transformation.



**Figure 5.19. Tina's classroom layout before transformation**



**Figure 5.20. Tina's classroom after transformation**

### 5.19.2. Access to resources

From the observation of Tina's classroom and from my interviews with the children, there is no free access to the resources. Children were only allowed to use the resources upon teacher's instructions. This is further exemplified in Section 5.29 later in this chapter.

Three main themes had emerged from the thematic analysis of the observation data which are: 1) classroom practice with subheadings of classroom environment and pedagogy; 2) support, with sub-heading regarding teachers' assistants; and 3) challenges.

## **5.20. Classroom practice**

### *5.20.1. Classroom environment*

According to the Brunei Preschool Curriculum (2012, p. 15), the classroom organisation should be interesting, conducive and tidy. The set up in the room should also be able to attract and motivate the teaching and learning process. The document also specified that inside the classroom there should be learning corners such as: i) a language corner, ii) a maths corner, iii) a science corner, iv) an ICT corner, v) an aesthetics and creativity corner, vi) a drama corner, vii) an enrichment corner and viii) a block and manipulatives corner. Outside the classroom it was stated there should be: i) a water play corner, ii) a sand play corner and iii) an outdoor play corner. From my observation of the four preschool classrooms, all four teachers have created learning corners inside the classroom after the transformation. However, variations in the amount of space and classroom layout influenced the extent to which teachers could provide these corners.

Let's look at Laila and Tina who are trained teachers. Before the transformation, Laila's and Tina's classrooms already had learning corners, such as the early science corner and the aesthetics corner; also the children's tables had been arranged in a group seating format. Before the transformation Hana and Anita only had reading corners.

All four teachers have similar learning corners from language corner, early science corner, reading corner, and even a mini stage or theatre that they use for role play activities and singing. However, not all of these focal points are situated within the classroom. Tina, Laila and Hana have their mini theatres within their classroom space. As for Anita, her mini theatre is outside her class as hers is located within a specialised Pra building.

It is also to be noted that the outdoor areas, such as playgrounds, do exist at three out of the four schools featured in this research. Hana does not have any playground in her school, while the rest of the teachers do. However, from my observation, children were seen playing only at Laila's and Tina's schools. Although Anita had a playground facility in her school, because of a recent injury of a child who fell down from the slide, it was then deemed to be unsafe and children were not allowed to play. Red tapes were seen around the playground to signify that there should not be any entry to the

playground. Looking at the condition of the playground at Anita's school, it was still a new playground and looked safe to play. Outdoor play was not observed as free play chosen by the children; they get to play outdoors upon teacher's instructions.

None of the four teachers has a water play area for the children. Only Hana was seen to have a sand play area in her class, and her children were also observed playing with it at times.

During my observation, there were no interactive whiteboards present in any of the four Pra classes. From the four teachers, they mentioned that it was ordered by the Ecce Unit already and may arrive later. It was observed that two teachers, Anita and Tina, have a personal computer (desktop) in their class, while Hana and Laila have no ICT hardware present in their classes. The ways Anita and Tina used the ICT were different. For Anita, she used the desktop computer, specifically the monitor, to help her deliver her lesson with PowerPoint slides. Children were seen typically sitting at the mat area facing the small monitor and watched their lessons from it, at the early development stage of their lesson. Anita was seen using the PowerPoint slides for six out of the seven observations. Tina on the other hand uses it for her own purpose such as making lesson plans. The computer in Tina's class was situated at the ICT corner of her class and mostly on display for the children to view, but not to play or work with. Therefore, the children from Hana's, Laila's and Tina's classes had no access to ICT.

## **5.21. Pedagogy**

### *5.21.1. Mat time (Whole group teaching)*

The teaching style is quite standard in terms of delivery, where the teachers usually start with set inductions of reading the prayer before studying. Then the lessons are followed by development stages of activities, and a conclusion in the end.

For the four teachers observed, their teaching style usually started with mat time where concepts were introduced and discussed with the children. They had all started their lesson with a whole group teaching approach. This approach involved the routine of reciting the prayer by reading it together before beginning the lesson, and also reciting another prayer together when they finished the lesson. From all the observations made of the four teachers in this study, most of the work is done on the mat area. The teacher

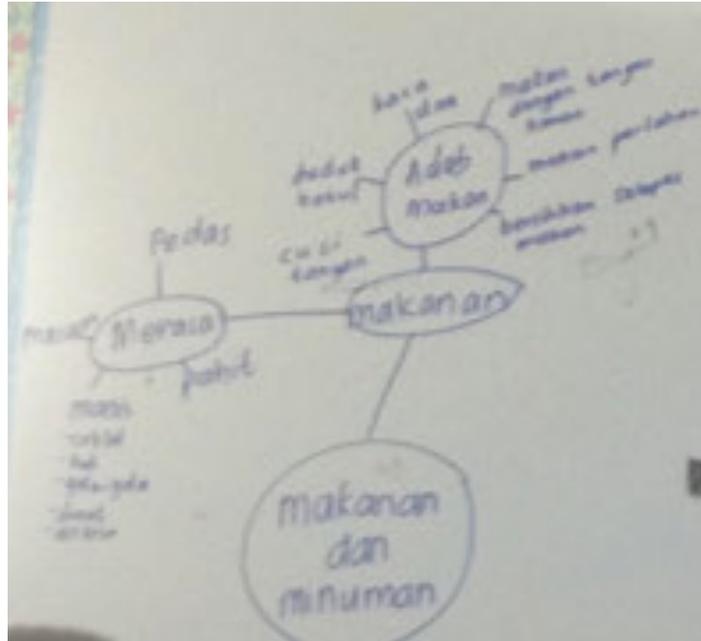
instructs the children about what to do and how they should be doing it. The work given was also provided in a similar format and every child is expected to finish the task at about the same time by working at the same pace.

#### *5.21.2. Mind map as lesson plan*

Before the transformation each teacher's lesson plan used to be in daily and linear format. The initiated change introduced to the Pra education system was the use of a mind map as a weekly lesson plan. This initiative was to provide flexibility to the teachers in achieving their lesson objectives across a 5-day span. All four teachers were embracing the change as they were observed to be using the mind map for planning their week's lessons. Therefore, the teachers no longer prepare daily lesson plans, as they did in the past. All four teachers had responded positively to the of mind map approach to facilitate the creation of their weekly lesson plan. The lesson plans of all four teachers were seen to be designed in accordance with the new mind map format, along with its objectives, integrated subjects and projects to be achieved by the end of the week.

#### *5.21.3. The use of a mind map in the lesson*

As observed, the children in all four of the teachers' classes were not yet at the independent reader stage, as the observations were taking place in the first term of school. Using the mind map in the lesson with the children was aimed to help children to be more expressive in asking questions related to the lesson's topic. The teachers wrote the topic on the whiteboard, together with the things the students were going to learn, or had already learnt, in the mind map form. However, none of the children asked the teachers questions regarding the mind map on the board. Therefore, none of the teachers incorporated any pictorial representations next to the words in the mind map on the board, although they acknowledged their children did not have the ability to read yet. It seems the mind map used was just used as if for teachers' own notes. An example of the mind map is shown in Figure 5.21 below.



**Figure 5.21. Laila’s example of a mind map on the board**

#### 5.21.4. The project approach

Throughout the observed lessons for all four teachers, none started the project approach as an exploratory topic on what the children already knew and what they would like to know more about. The project approach is another element of change introduced to the Pra education system by the ECCE Unit. This approach was aimed to make the children become more creative, expressive and become independent thinkers. All four teachers were observed using the idea of making projects at the end of the day. The projects done were either group based or individual based.

Here is an example from Laila’s class, where her topic was ‘My house’. She asked the children to paint and draw the boxes that they have brought from home to represent houses. This was done towards the end of the day just before home time. When the children have not finished the task, it was carried out the next day until everyone had completed it. Therefore, the activities were not varied to each child’s interests, as the teacher (in this case Laila) had instructed on and planned what the children should be doing. All her students were expected to finish at the same time.

An example from Anita’s session was the theme of ‘Myself’, with the specific topic being ‘sense of taste’. Towards the end of her session, she asked the children to create their own ice cream using paper, cotton-wool and glitters. It was a pasting and colouring activity. She called this project work to be done individually. She waited for every child

to finish. She also provided instructions on what to use and exactly what to do. So there are 'uniform' work outputs from the children; creativity was not nurtured in this case, whereas the ability to follow instructions was.

Tina on the other hand was not observed doing any projects or any group work hands on activities with the children. Her teaching can be predicted as it follows the same routine of mat time in the beginning and until the end of her session. Activities, such as game based play, were done only briefly to answer mathematical addition questions. Then she resorted back to written task activities from the workbook.

#### *5.21.5. Showcase*

Showcase is also another element of change introduced to the Pra education system. Showcase was done three times every school year; once towards the end of every term. Due to my data collection period, I was not able to witness any of the showcases although I did manage to observe some preparations for a showcase. The showcase was introduced to enable the children to be involved with school activities in showing what they were learning and doing in their classes. The idea was also to involve parents to come to school to find out more about their children's learning. From my observation three teachers; Tina, Laila and Anita, were taking more time out for practicing the children's acts; they planned for children to perform like a 'mini concert'. The songs and acts were new to the children as the songs were not what they sang in their lessons, and so were unrelated to their term topics. Hana on the contrary, from her explanation and my observation of her preparations before I left, was preparing and updating the children's work. She encouraged her children to explain to their parent what they did in class. In her preparation for the showcase, she did not go to the extreme of introducing new songs or acts. She simply used her learning corners and displayed children's work for children to tell their parents and bring their parents around the class. Therefore, three teachers were conducting the showcase as a big thing in introducing new acts for children to perform. However, Hana, an untrained teacher, was doing it 'as natural as it can be' without the need to introduce new songs, and with her young students only performing the songs that they had already learnt in class.

#### *5.21.6. Learning corners*

As observed, the learning corners were set up in all the four classrooms, but they were not used during any of the activities. The learning corners were only used to display children's work. However, the reading corner was used indirectly, after activities were done by the children. This means that when the children finished their written task, they go to the reading corner to read while waiting for their friends to finish. The reading corner was used as a means of managing the children. The resources area was used, as observed, for children to take stationeries that they needed. Other than that, no learning activity was seen to be carried out at the learning corners during my observation sessions.

### **5.22. Support**

#### *5.22.1. Teachers' assistants*

Temporary teachers' assistants were one of the changes introduced into the Pra education system. Three teachers had assistants who were temporary volunteer students, whereas Hana had a parent volunteer as her teacher's assistant. Observations of seven lessons from each teacher revealed that the temporary teachers' assistants did not come to class on a regular basis. From the seven observations done for each teacher, I managed to observe the assistant present in Laila's session for three days; five sessions for Anita and three sessions for Tina. The absence of the teachers' assistants does make a difference to Anita and Laila's teaching. When their assistants were present, both Anita and Laila were observed sharing some tasks in managing and monitoring the children's work with the volunteer assistants. The situation is different for Hana; it was noted she had the parent volunteer in class for every session during my observations and any tasks were shared. However, it should be emphasised that the main teaching sessions were still conducted by the teachers themselves. Tina on the other hand, did not include her assistant in her activities. The assistant was observed to only sit and watch the classroom events, being assigned basic duties such as accompanying the children to the restroom.

A change in practice was observed when there were teachers' assistants present; Anita's and Laila's classes became livelier as the teachers managed to include game-based activities that, however, were still structured by the teacher. Managing different tasks was also observed where the children get to be grouped into pairs during activities. The

teacher had a different task for the children, while the assistant teacher had another task. However, it seemed that they were doing differentiated activities but when looking into the task, it was either game based play activity with the teacher or written activities with the teachers' assistants. The tasks prepared for the children were actually similar. When the teacher assistants were absent, the learning then takes place through whole group teaching for Anita and Laila. For Tina, her teaching style does not change; she only used whole group teaching throughout the seven observed lessons, and all in the mat area. She also provided the same worksheets and tasks for children to do. Hana on the other hand, although having the privilege of a dedicated and stable assistant who attended her class everyday throughout my observed period, still used whole group teaching throughout. She used her teaching assistant to help her with children who were in need of extra attention. By her assistant doing this, Hana was able to concentrate on the other children in the class.

### **5.23. Challenges**

The third theme to emerge from observing the four teachers was 'challenges'. The challenges observed were: a) the children with special needs and b) the absence of teachers' assistants.

Tina and Anita both had one child with special needs (SENA) in their class. Due to the large class size, and having no teacher assistant continuously present, it was challenging for the two teachers to manage the needs of their SENA children. It was observed that a SENA teacher comes in briefly for 20 minutes and then, for the rest of the day, the SENA children were left to follow the lessons with difficulty. Tina and Anita struggled to provide appropriate attention at times, when the SENA children were left to do their own tasks or were simply left observing everyone else. The absence of a teacher's assistant also created challenges, especially for Anita and Laila; whereas for Hana and Tina the issue of assistants was of less importance, as explained earlier in this chapter.

Challenges that the teachers faced were not expressed openly as there seemed to be some reservations as to how the teachers are implementing the changes. An observation made in one Pra committee meeting was that the teachers were discussing the issues among themselves. Memo observations and reflections are presented below.

#### *5.23.1. Memo observation (May 2014):*

Professional dialogue can be challenging. The implementation of the changes has divided the teachers into opposing parties: those who were in agreement and those who were not in agreement with the changes. The teachers were voicing their reflections and concerns in trying out the initiated changes. In my view, although the way the professional dialogue sounded appeared biased more towards concerns and disagreements, the positive ‘takeaway message’ is that these teachers are not in tension. In fact, they did mention that they have tried implementing the changes. I saw their discussions as no more than a purely critical reflection from the teachers’ perspective, representing issues they had brought along to the dialogue. The teachers professional dialogue also confirmed that the teachers have participated in the changes and are facing some barriers in trying them any further. As observed, they were sharing their knowledge, reflections and intellectual exchanges by debating aspects of their experiences. Their debate also reaffirms that they have been working collaboratively, as their interactions have brought clarifications of thoughts and approaches to the problems mentioned. Furthermore, it showed that there is support from the ECCE Unit towards the implementation of change. It further exemplifies the distributed leadership style, as referred to by Harris, 2004.

#### **5.24. Summary of the findings from observing the four teachers**

The findings resulting from observing the four teachers in their classrooms failed to clearly demonstrate any child-centred approaches or practices to learning. There were elements of educational play when teachers did game based activities, and it is fair to say all four teachers are trying to embrace the pedagogical changes. Looking deeper, the teachers were still grounded on the whole-class teaching model, whose main characteristics are: i) it is mostly teacher structured ii) it is teacher planned, and iii) it is driven by teacher directed activities. This matter will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

## **5.25. Findings from the children**

### **5.25.1. Introduction**

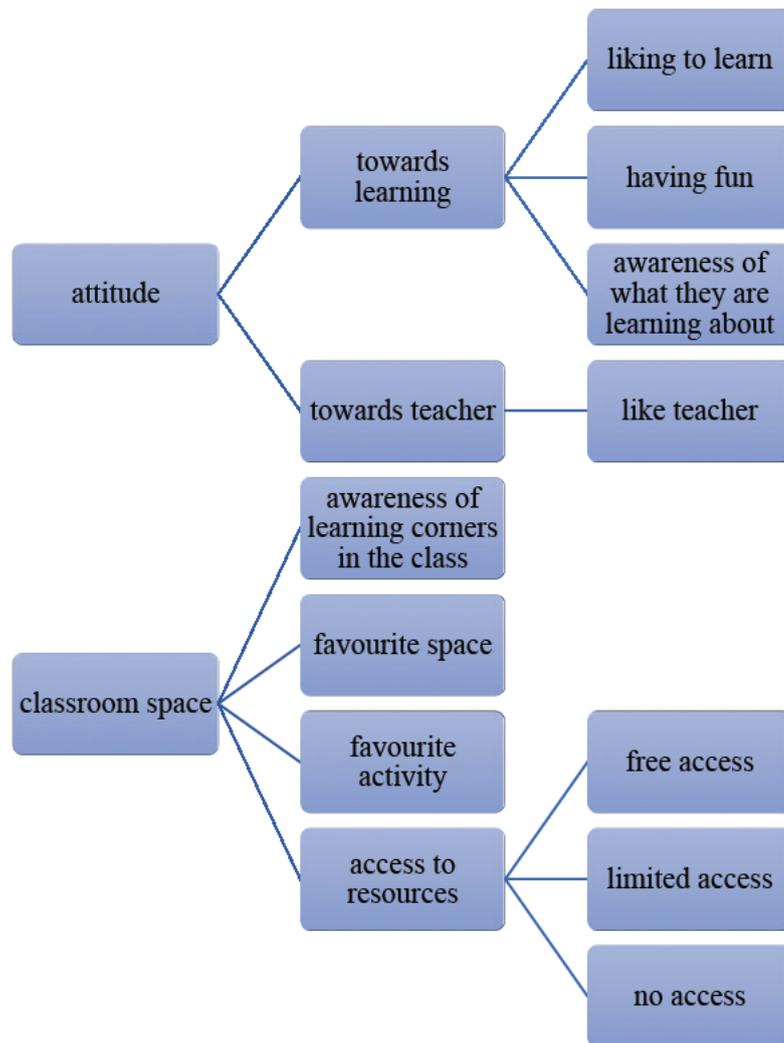
This section of Chapter 5 reports on the findings from the children, specifically relating to research question four of this research: *“How do the eight Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?”* This chapter presents two themes that emerged from the data analysis of the children’s responses: a) attitude and b) classroom environment. The presentation will begin with the children’s background information and the ways data were gathered from the children; to be followed by the presentation of the emerging themes that have been explained earlier.

## **5.26. Children’s information and data collection**

There were eight children who were interviewed in this study; two each from four schools. They were five and six year olds and their names are Minor, Arif, Qilah, Afendi, Azim, Iqbal, Melina and Saiful, as represented in Table 4.2, Chapter 4. There were six boys and two girls in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this research does not aim to identify any difference(s) between male and female respondents. Also, the selection of the children was based on teachers’ recommendations, together with parents’ consent, and each child’s consent, as well as their participation. Observation, discussion and drawings were the methods used to collect the data from the eight preschool children. The aim of the research discussion with the children was to find out their teaching and learning experiences in the preschool classes at this time of curriculum reform. The research discussion was also used to validate the observation findings, to see how children are learning in class by taking into account their experiences. The way the data was gathered from the children was also explained earlier in Chapter 4.

## **5.27. Emerging themes from children’s findings**

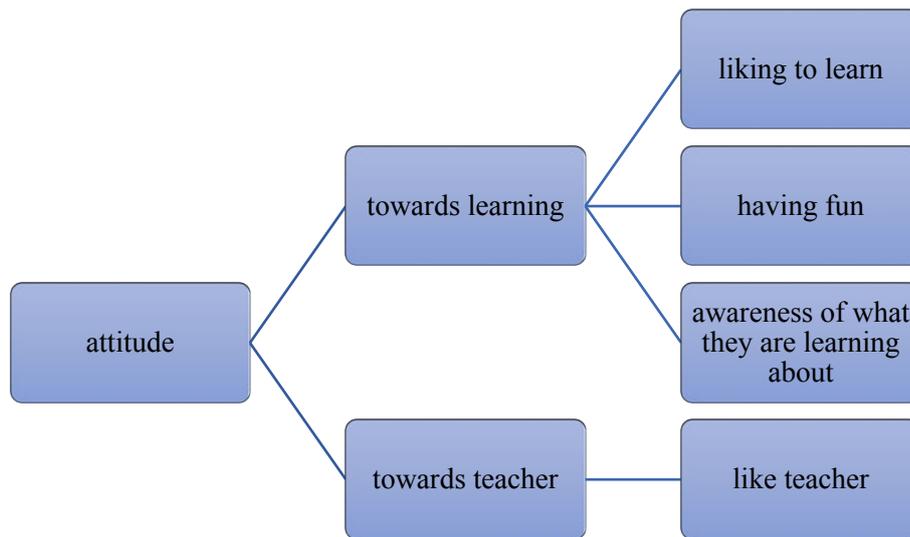
Figure 5.22 shows two major themes from the children’s perspectives: i) attitude and ii) classroom environment.



**Figure 5.22. Themes emerging from children's findings**

### 5.28. Attitude

Attitude is the first theme identified from the children's data. Two sub-headings emerged from the young respondents' comments, as shown in Figure 5.23 below: a) attitudes towards learning, and b) attitudes towards their teachers.



**Figure 5.23. First major theme for children’s findings**

### 5.29. Attitudes towards learning

From the interviews and discussions with the eight children, all mentioned that they enjoyed school as it is a ‘fun place’. The quotations from the children indicated their positive attitudes towards learning, which were categorised into sub-themes of i) liking to learn, ii) having fun, and iii) awareness of what they are learning.

#### 5.29.1. Liking to learn

All of the eight children had positive attitudes towards learning and focused on enjoying learning. Azim likes school and loves to learn. When he is learning something, he does not like to give up and so will keep on trying. He also knows that he will be rewarded by his parents, by having a new toy if he does well.

*“I like to learn. When I try to learn something new, I never want to give up. I like to come to school and read books. I like school and learning because if I do well, I get a new toy, a big toy!” (C-Azim)*

Afendi, Qilah, Iqbal, Melina, Minor and Arif mentioned that they enjoy coming to school and ‘getting to learn new things’.

*“I love to be at school because I get to learn”. (C- Afendi)*

*“I like to learn in my class because there is a reading corner. I like all the books there”. (C-Qilah)*

*“I like to come to school because I want to learn”. (C-Iqbal)*

*“I like to learn and draw pictures of fish and other things”. (C-Melina)*

*“I like to be at school and learn new things”. (C-Minor)*

*“I like to learn and make projects”. (C-Arif)*

Saiful, on the other hand, likes school because he enjoys working together with his friends.

*“I like to learn at school together with my friends”. (C-Saiful)*

#### 5.29.2. Having fun

These children mentioned that they were having fun at school. Arif, Minor and Melina tell us that they find school is fun as they can play in the playground.

*“I like school because it is fun! I can play in the playground”. (C-Arif)*

*“I like school because I can play, play in the playground with friends! It is fun! There were a lot of pencils in the class”. (C-Minor)*

*“It is fun coming to school as there is the playground. In this class, it is also fun because there are lots of things to do like, drawing fish and making them into fun art!” (C-Melina)*

Meanwhile, Afendi, Saiful, Iqbal and Qilah tell us that they are having fun at school by having lots of books to read, getting to do things with friends and showing what they have learnt.

*“Learning is fun and there are a lot of books to read”. (C-Afendi)*

*“We read our prayers and then learn maths. We learn to make a mirror from paper. It is fun. We get to do a lot of things with friends, that’s why it is fun!” (C-Saiful)*

*“Learning is fun! I can show my parents what I can do.” (C-Iqbal)*

*“Today is fun at school. School is always fun! I can write number 3 without any help!” (C-Qilah)*

The children are enthusiastic when saying the school is fun. From my observation of the children during their lessons, they were eager and participated well in class. The children are ready to learn when their teachers have explained an activity to them.

### 5.29.3. Awareness of what they are learning about

These children were also found to be aware of what they are learning about in their classroom.

*“We learnt about transportation and drew cars, then we have English and learn the ABCs” (C-Afendi)*

*“Today we learnt number 3. I love school and love to learn, we get to do a lot of things. We also have ABCs to practice for homework. If I can read already, there will be lots of books to read! So exciting!” (C-Iqbal)*

*“The other day we made a house from paper. I feel so happy because my house was displayed on the wall for everyone to see. I can tell my parents that I did it myself because I focused. I am a good boy because if I can focus, that means I am a good boy”. (C- Iqbal)*

*“My class is fun even without the playground. There are lots of things we can do in the class. Last week we made a fish and a big book. There are lots of pictures that I draw in the big book. I made it myself without help from anyone as I know how to do it already.” (C-Melina)*

*“We had a showcase recently and my grandmother came to take pictures of my work for my parents. I was so happy and proud to show my grandmother my displayed work.” (C-Melina)*

*“School is OK today. I played at the playground with my friends, then we had English class. Our activity was learning about under and on. Then we learn about different types of fruits!” (C- Melina)*

*“We had a showcase recently and we were given presents for doing well at the showcase”. (C-Arif)*

Azim’s awareness of what he has learnt at school is illustrated in his drawing. He explained about the theme of the week which is ‘House’. He explained who he was living with and the playground in front of his house.



Azim drew the house as it is the theme for this week. He explained that he is living there with his parents and two sisters. There is a playground in front of his house which has a slide and a swing.

Azim then drew another house on a different piece of paper to explain the different parts of his house and pointed them out; such as roof, windows and doors.



Azim drew a house to show that he was learning about it and explained the different parts of the house.

He then added a picture to show that he did the learning with his friends, and even drew numbers that they were learning.



Azim drew himself with a group of friends doing work together.

Although all the children expressed positive attitudes towards learning, there were some children who enjoy it, in addition to their awareness of being able to do well. Azim is positive with his attitudes towards learning; he is also concerned about doing well. He is aware of his learning and the expectations of adults (his parents and elder siblings) for him. He explained that if he does well in school, and, is able to go to Science College, he will get lots and lots of presents. The Science College is one of the top secondary schools in Brunei, which recruits excellent students who ‘ace’ their Primary Year 6 exams with straight A grades. Azim expresses his concerns towards learning as he is aware the level of the learning will get more difficult. He is also aware that speaking in English will be more difficult, and he mentioned that for now, he does not really understand the language well. Azim is also aware that he will be rewarded with toys if he does make progress with the language.

*“I like school and learning at Science College will be more difficult. My sister told me it is not hard to learn English as she can already read and understand English books. But when she read them to me, I do not understand them all. I love school and draw people too. If I learn until I can go to Science College,*

*then my brother will buy me lots and lots of toys. I can even ask for the toys I wanted". (C-Azim)*

Arif is also aware of his learning and the rewards. He mentioned that the class were given presents by their teacher after doing well.

*"We had a showcase recently and we were given presents for doing well at the showcase". (C-Arif)*

An excerpt from Saiful's discussion shows us his awareness about his learning and reveals his awareness of the adult (his father's) expectations of his learning, specifically that "he must do well" and is praised as a "good boy" for doing so. Simultaneously, Saiful and the rest of the children are saying they are enjoying their learning and having fun too.

*I: What did you do in school today?*

*C: I learn. I arrive at school and sit down. We read our prayers and then learn maths. We learn to make a mirror from paper. It is fun.*

*I: Why is it fun?*

*C: We get to do things with friends, that's why it is fun.*

*I: Pointed to a picture and asked the child to explain.*

*C: That is the picture during the showcase. I get to show my parents what I did at school.*

*I showed them the picture I made.*

*I: How did you feel then?*

*C: I feel so proud because I get to do it myself. My father said I must do well and he said, 'Good boy!'*

*(C-Saiful)*

Iqbal also showed us that he is also aware of adult expectations; in this case his teacher. He said that he needed to focus on his learning to be a good boy. Not only that, but he is also aware of his learning skills; whereby if he is able to read, that skill can provide him with the ability to read more books. He enjoys the learning process and is also rewarded by the adults in his world: parents and teacher.

*"My teacher likes to tell me that I am a good boy and if I focus, I am a good boy". (C-Iqbal)*

*"If I can read already, there will be lots of books to read! So exciting!" (C-Iqbal)*

*My parents came to the showcase and I showed my work to them. They said, "Good boy!", and I had a rainbow cake as a present!" (C-Iqbal)*

Some of the children are saying slightly different things although they are all very positive towards their learning. The first group of children mentioned they liked learning. The second group of children talked about learning being fun and enjoying the playground. The third group of children showed that they are aware of some of the things that they have been learning. Their responses also show that children know how to behave in the “expected manner” and are aware of what they can achieve or be rewarded with. This performance shows that these children are aware of their responsibilities and their own learning at a very young age. Their feedback also showed that the children are aware of what is needed when in school, such as listening to their teacher, behaving well, and also meeting significant adults’ (teachers and parents) expectations at a young age. The children are clearly aware of talking specifically about what they are learning; their positive attitudes are about doing specific things. The children’s attitudes towards both learning and their teacher are also about expressing their emotions and feelings: “I like to have fun”, “I feel proud”, “I don’t want to give up”. So, they have formed a good awareness of what school is all about and the things they have to do in school, “You have to focus to be a good boy”, but they are also saying that they are having fun.

The children are all positive, and they have a good understanding of what they have to do to be a good pupil. They are aware of approval from the teacher, approval from parents as seen by quotes such as: “making my father happy”, “I must do as my father said, I must do well”. Although there are positive attitudes towards the teacher and positive attitudes towards learning, these children are concerned with being really good.

### **5.30. Attitudes towards teachers**

All eight children have positive attitudes towards their teachers. They mentioned that they liked their teachers. They bring obvious enthusiasm when they participate in lessons by answering their teachers’ questions. From the class teaching and learning observation, all the children showed their respect by listening to their teachers and following instructions given when doing learning activities. This positive conduct is further portrayed when resources in the room are limited, and the children obeyed the set of rules given; for example, ‘not playing with some of the resources available in the class or even touching and moving them’. Discussion with the children also elicits sub-

themes that emerged from children's attitudes towards their teacher; such as liking their teachers.

#### 5.30.1. Liking the teacher

The children expressed their positive attitudes of liking their teacher because of their teacher displaying their work, the activities prepared for them and the access they have to the resources, like being able to borrow and read books.

*"I like my teacher as she likes to hang my work on the wall!" (C-Melina)*

*"I love my teacher and like to listen to her and do activities with her. She always has interesting activities for us to do". (C-Azim)*

*"I like my teacher as she teaches us many things. Every day, we do as the teacher tells us during our learning time". (C- Afendi)*

*"I like my teacher because she prepares us with lots of activities to do!" (C-Minor)*

*"My work gets displayed on the wall. I like my teacher for doing that". (C- Arif)*

*"I like my teacher. She lets us play and use the story books for reading. We can also take the book home to borrow if we want to". (C-Qilah)*

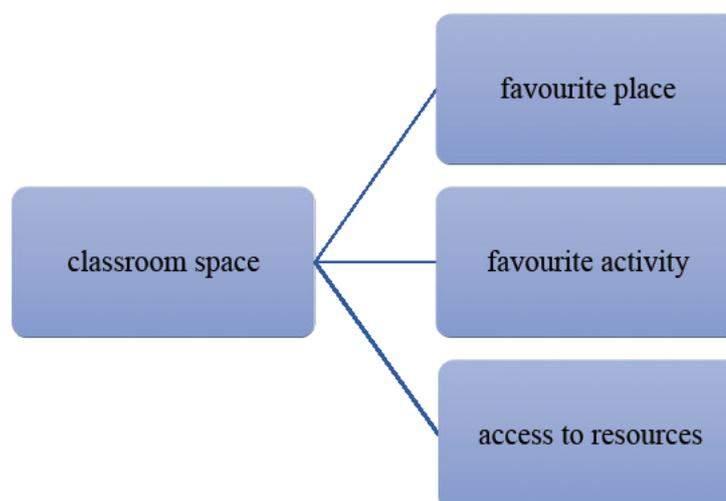
*"I like my teacher. My teacher likes to tell me that I am a good boy and if I focus, I am a good boy". (C-Iqbal)*

The children are saying that they like their teachers for various reasons, as mentioned above. We have Afendi who mentioned, *"Every day, we do as the teacher tells us during our learning time"*. Afendi is enjoying his learning in school and is also having fun in following what his teacher tells him to do every day.

We also have Iqbal, who is aware of his teacher's expectations in learning; if and when he focuses during lessons he is considered 'a good boy'. He is enjoying school, the learning and also enjoys focusing on his learning. These children are concerned with behaving well, which for them means 'trying to meet their teachers' expectations in lessons'.

### 5.31. Classroom space

Classroom space is the second major theme to emerge from the children's responses, informed by three sub-themes: i) favourite place; ii) favourite activity; and iii) access to resources (as illustrated in Figure 5.24 below).



**Figure 5.24. Second major theme for children's findings**

#### 5.31.1. Favourite place

When the children were asked about the areas in their classrooms, all eight of them were able to explain what they are, and the types of resources located there. The classroom areas are divided into sections, called 'learning corners', and these children know the names of the areas such as *book corner*, *arts corner*, *maths corner* and so on. They also know when to use the spaces and when not to use them. This 'knowing' leads them to identify their favourite place in the classroom verbally and through drawing.

Azim, likes the maths corner and enjoys it, as there are many things to learn that excite him.

*"I like the maths corner as there is lots to learn". (C-Azim)*

Five of the eight children - Minor, Qilah, Afendi, Arif and Iqbal - share the same favourite space in their class, which is the book corner. They all mentioned that they love to read books there.

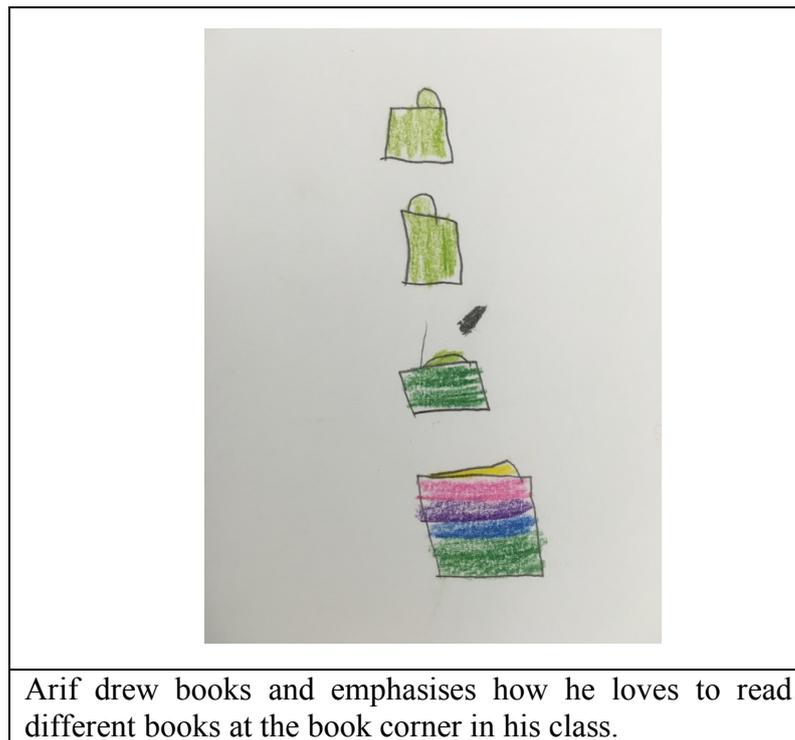
*"I like the reading corner as I love the books there. I can go there after we finished our work". (C-Minor)*

*"I like the reading corner because I like to read!" (C-Qilah)*

*“I like the reading corner. I like to sit there looking at the pictures from the book”.* (C- Afendi)

*“I also like the book corner as there are many books”.* (C-Iqbal)

Arif illustrates his favourite space by drawing different books to represent the book corner. During drawing, Arif said he loves to read different books and likes to sit at the book corner in his class.



Melina has identified a space in the classroom that she has never used as her favourite space. The round table at the back of the class is the toys corner in Melina’s class. She identified it as her favourite space in the class because of the toys arranged there. This is her wish to be able to use the space as she is not allowed to use it. The toys corner as observed looks accessible, safe and ready to invite children. Melina reported her teacher does not allow anyone to go to the toys corner freely or without any teacher’s instruction. Although she has never used the space there, Melina identifies it as her favourite space.

*“I like the round table at the back of the class and it has lots of toys”.*  
(C-Melina)

Saiful also told us of a space in his classroom that he likes as his favourite place: the book corner. He does not yet have full access to the books and can only take the phonics reading book but not the storybooks at the book corner. He expressed that the mat area is also his favourite place, as it is colourful and because it is near to the book corner, which he enjoys.

*“The mat area is also my favourite as it is colourful. I can sit there with my friends and it is also next to the book corner”.* (C-Saiful)

Melina and Saiful has been responding to their favourite place in the classroom as a place that they wish they could access; the former for toys and the latter for the reading books. They were only allowed to use the phonics reading books and they hope that soon they can also be allowed to use the story books available.

Then we have Iqbal and Saiful, who both love the desk area in their classroom space.

*“I like the desk area and do work together with my friends. I also like the book corner as there are many books”.* (C-Iqbal)

*“I like my desk area as it has a little bin for me to sharpen my pencils as I love to draw”.* (C- Saiful)

The children are telling us the different areas of the classroom space that they considered as their favourite spaces. This identifying of the children’s favourite spaces is in parallel to the first major theme of the children’s findings, that they are positive in their learning attitudes and also enjoy the spaces in their respective classrooms.

Although two children reported that their favourite places are the space that they are not allowed to use, they can still enjoy other places in their classroom. Indirectly, these two children are expressing their wishes to be allowed to use the spaces they like; however, as yet they cannot go there as the teacher does not provide free access. Both children will be allowed to use their preferred spaces only when given permission by the teacher.

#### *5.31.2. Favourite activity*

The children were asked about their favourite activity in the class; their responses identified a wide range of activities which reflected their positive attitudes towards learning, as expressed earlier. Their favourite activities are categorised into drawing and colouring; cooking; reading; making projects; and playing.

Azim likes to draw as his favourite activity, and Saiful loves to colour.

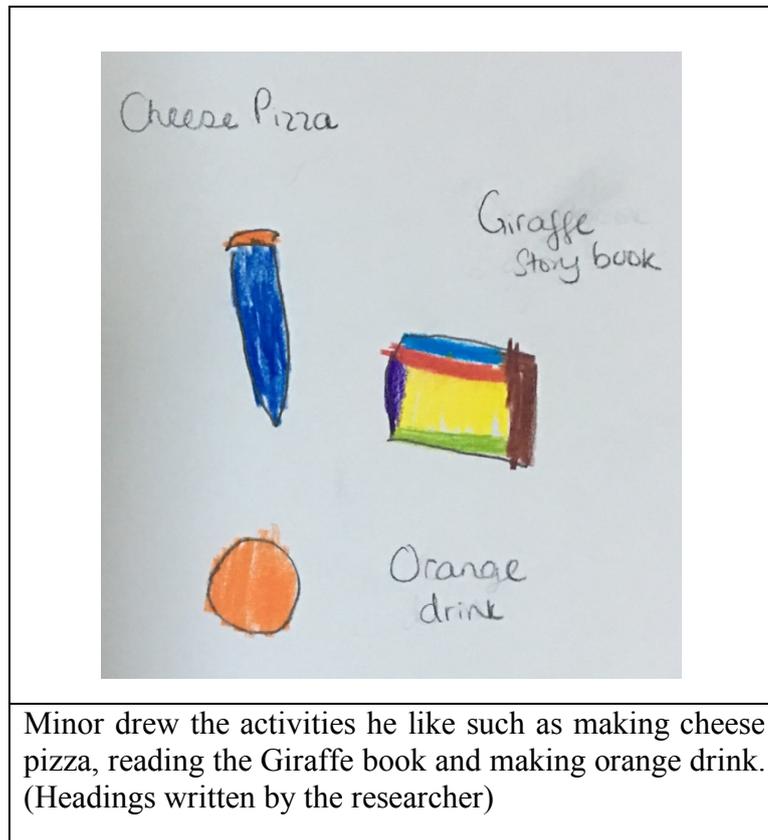
*“I like to learn drawing. Drawing is my favourite activity”.* (C-Azim)

*“I like colouring and when I use many colours it becomes beautiful”.* (C-Saiful)

Cooking is Arif’s and Minor’s favourite activity. Arif is having fun doing the cooking activity and is proud to tell his parents what he has achieved. Minor is also enjoying it and drew the activities he liked doing in the class like making cheese pizza, and making the orange drink.

*“I like the cooking activity in class. The other day we made cheese pizza, orange drink, and spaghetti”.* It was so much fun! I felt proud and excited to tell my parents. (C- Arif)

*“I like making cheese pizza... and making orange drink”.* (C-Minor)



Reading is Arif’s and Minor’s favourite activity in the class too. Minor mentioned that he likes to read the Giraffe story book and drew a picture of it as shown above. Arif also drew different books in his drawing (presented earlier) about the book corner as his favourite place, and reading as his favourite activity.

*“I like reading activities so I can read more books”. (C- Minor)*

*“I like...reading the Giraffe book...”. (C-Minor)*

*“I like to read different books at the book corner”. (C-Arif)*

Making projects is also identified as a favourite activity by Iqbal, Afendi and Melina. Melina mentioned that she likes making big books, as it will enable her to draw and add pictures to them.

*“I like making the big book activity where I can draw a fish and put pictures in”. (C-Melina)*

As for Iqbal and Afendi, they love making projects, as they enjoy their work being displayed after finishing it; both consider it as a fun activity to do.

*“I like doing all the activities in the class and do it by myself so teacher can hang it. I like doing projects. Recently, we made a car and teacher taught us how to make it. (C-Iqbal)*

*“I like project activities because when my parents come to school they can see my work. I can tell them I learn to stamp shades and it is fun when they come”. (C- Afendi)*

Meanwhile, playing is Qilah’s and Arif’s favourite activity in the classroom. Qilah likes to play with sand and writes on it, while Arif enjoys playing in the classroom.

*“I like playing with sand. I like to put it into the container and write on the sand”. (C-Qilah)*

*“I like to play in the class”. (C- Arif)*

All eight children provided further emphasis on how they are experiencing and enjoying learning within their classroom space. They also showed how they are having fun with the activities they have in their classrooms.

### **5.32. Access to resources**

Findings from discussions with the children identified whether children were having free access, limited access or no access to the resources in their classrooms.

#### *5.32.1. Free access*

Arif, Afendi, Qilah and Minor showed us, during their research discussion, about how they have free access when using the resources available from the learning spaces. They

can go to the learning corners when they need to, by themselves, after finishing the work given by the teacher. From my observation of these children, they were seen going to the resources whenever they needed something, without having to ask the teacher's permission. They were independent with what they need to use or take from the resources kept in the learning spaces.

*“When I come to school I straightaway go to the reading corner to read. My teacher allows us to do so. When we finish reading all the books, our teacher will change them with more new books to read. We also get to use the rest of the things in the class when we need it like glue, sharpeners, erasers, pencils, papers and many more”. (C- Arif)*

*“We can play at the toys area”. (C- Afendi)*

*“We have a reading corner. Everyone can go there any time to read and borrow books”. (C-Qilah)*

*“I like the reading corner as I love the books there. I can go there after we finished our work”. (C- Minor)*

#### 5.32.2. Limited access

Limited access here means that although the children are allowed to use the resources available in the learning spaces, they were not given permission to use them all; only some. Azim and Iqbal illustrate this in the research discussion below. Azim talked about the round table at the arts corner in his classroom. He considers that it is better to work at, and finds his desk area too crowded. From my classroom observation of Azim's desk area, he was sitting in a group of four, or sometimes up to six children, as a group. The round table is just next to his desk. He can only use the round table when they are having arts activities. Although he reported having limited access to it, he is having fun when using it.

*“This round art table is better to work with as where I sit at the desk area, it is too crowded and here is more fun”. (C-Azim)*

Iqbal, on the other hand, revealed how he has limited access to the reading book corner in his classroom. He reported that they are allowed to take the books from it, but only the phonics reading book and not the story books. His teacher is the only one having free access to the story books. Iqbal explained that his teacher will take a story book and read it to them. Not only that, Iqbal also mentioned that he and his classmates are also not allowed to sit at the book corner; they are only allowed to take the phonics reading book and then sit at their desks.

*“We can only take reading books that we use to learn phonics from the reading corner. Story books are not allowed. We cannot sit at the reading corner. We take the reading book and sit at our desk area”. (C- Iqbal).*

*“We cannot take the story books as we like. Teacher will take it out for us and read it aloud for the children”. (C-Iqbal)*

### 5.32.3. No access

No access means the children cannot go to the learning corners to take out any resources. Iqbal, Melina and Saiful each talked about how the resources in their classroom space were for display only and that they were not allowed even to touch them.

Iqbal reported that he and his friends do not have access to the story books, as mentioned earlier; meaning that they have no access to the story books at all. This is similar to Melina’s report from the discussion. They were not allowed to touch them although they are displayed at the book corner. From my classroom observation, the phonics books were placed at the first and second shelves and the third and fourth shelves contained the story books. The children only go to the book corner to pick the phonics reader books and none of them were seen touching the story books.

*“We cannot sit at the reading corner. We can only take the phonics books and read at our desks. We cannot take the story books. Only our teacher can take the story book and read it for us”. (C-Iqbal)*

*“This is the book corner. I can take the orange and the blue phonics books only. The rest are story books but we have never read them. We cannot read them. We are not allowed”. (C-Melina)*

Melina and Iqbal also explained that they were not allowed to move or touch the resources that they were not allowed to use and how their teacher reacted angrily when they did so.

*“There are many toys and puppets in the class. We cannot touch them. They are cute to play with but teacher will get angry if we touch or move it. Because it is cute and pretty to look at, I just see it without contact”. (C-Iqbal)*

*“Now, the toys are only kept and displayed. We are only allowed to look at it. I never touched it. Once my friend touched it, the teacher was angry and my friend put it back. We have never played with them except our friend, Han, who is a special needs student”. (C-Melina)*

Then we have Saiful and Melina explaining how they were once given free access to the toys area at the beginning of the year when they have just started Pra. It was during the settling in weeks that these children explained the change from having free access to the 'no access' situation restricting them now.

*"This is the play area but we are not allowed to take or play with any of them. Earlier when we first started school, we were allowed to play with them but now, we cannot". (C-Saiful)*

*"We are not allowed to play with the toys anymore as teacher said we are big already. We only played with the toys during our orientation at the beginning of the year when we first entered Pra. Now, the toys are only kept and displayed. We are only allowed to look at them. I never touched them. Once my friend touched a toy, the teacher was angry and my friend put it back. We have never played with them except our friend, Han, who is a special needs assistant student". (C-Melina)*

Next, we have further evidence of how children can be reluctant to use the resources area, when as part of the research I requested them to take and do something with the resources from the restricted areas. Melina is seen reluctant and hesitant when I requested her to use the puppet from the restricted access areas in her classroom space. Iqbal was seen worried when I wanted to take a storybook. This reaction from Melina and Iqbal, showed that they are scared their teacher might get angry with them for taking and using the cited resources.

*When asked to get one of the puppets, Melina was hesitant. I took it for her and asked her to put her hand inside the puppet. Melina was reluctant to do so and she said, "We have never used the puppet". (C-Melina)*

*I tried to get one of the story books available at the book corner in Iqbal's classroom. When I was about to reach for it, Iqbal reacted quickly saying, "Don't take it! You cannot take it! My teacher will get angry with you". (C-Iqbal)*

Then we have Melina and Saiful mentioning that they wished to be able to use the restricted areas in their classroom space. I was using the art table at the back of the classroom to have the research discussion with Melina and she is having fun sitting there. She expressed it was her first time, as the art table is identified as a 'no access' area and Han (a child with special needs) was the only one allowed to use it.

*"The art table at the back of the classroom and that we are using now is only for Han and we are not allowed here. This is my first time. I wish I can sit here when I want to, as it is fun". (C- Melina)*

Saiful wished he could have access to the book corner as that is currently restricted. As mentioned earlier, he identified the mat area as his favourite place because it is near to the book corner.

*“The mat area is also my favourite as it is colourful. I can sit there with my friends and it is also next to the book corner”.* (C-Saiful)

### **5.33. Summary of the children’s findings**

There is a contradiction and identified tension that emerges from the children’s data. The children’s perceptions and experiences matter in this research study. They bring insights to their learning experiences and how they can, or cannot, access the learning resources in their classroom spaces. It can be seen that the children have positive attitudes towards their learning and their teachers. They are enjoying and having fun with their learning, but they are also seen as either having the freedom to use the learning resources, limited access to them, or even no access at all. When children are having limited access or no access, these are the groups of children who need the teacher’s permission to use the resources; or the children will simply not ask to access the resources for fear of being scolded. Then these are the group of children who, although enjoying doing activities in class, are also ‘tolerating’ the adults’ (teachers’) orders or rules on what to use and what not to use in the classroom. Although they are ‘tolerating’ the adults’ rules, these children are silently telling us that they also need, or would very much like, to access the resources when appropriate.

The findings revealed in this study, suggest that we will not be able to ‘read’ what the children are experiencing in their learning, simply by doing classroom observations. What we ‘read’ from our observations may not bring out the ‘juice’ inside. It is very important to have research discussions with the children, when doing classroom observation, as the children will be able to bring further insights to unfold the stories of how the students use, or do not use, their learning spaces. An example of the insights provided by the children’s comments relates to my observation that the children were allowed to use the art table freely. The research discussion revealed a different side of the story; how the young students were only allowed to use the table during art activities; at all other times, it was a restricted area.

## 5.34. Senior officers' interview findings

### 5.34.1. Introduction

This section presents the two senior officers' interview findings regarding the implementation of educational change in Pra classes. It will look at five themes that emerge from the senior officer's responses: 1) reasons for change; 2) awareness of teachers' challenges; 3) challenges in implementing change; 4) support and 5) characteristics of an ideal teacher. The two senior officers are identified as SO1, from the ECCE Unit, and SO2, from the Curriculum Development Department, to differentiate their responses and feedback.

## 5.35. Emerging themes from senior officers' interview findings

Figure 5.25 presents the five main themes from the senior officers' interview findings.



**Figure 5.25. Main themes from senior officers' data**

### 5.36. Reasons for change

From the research discussion conducted both officers explained the reasons for implementing changes to the Pra education system as ways to improve and upgrade the low quality classroom settings and the activities that occurred within them. These reasons were based on their observations that they made during their working visits to schools and when conducting continuous professional developments with the Pra

teachers. SO1 mentioned that the Pra curriculum is still in need of reviewing, as was currently happening.

*“Quality was not sustained between 1979-2010 and from our visits to find out whether it is high quality or low quality delivery in the preschools.... We started off with capacity building programmes because of the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning...from our observations in 2010, there were lots of teacher made materials and commercial posters in the Pra classrooms. So we provide the capacity building programmes as interventions to the low quality setting”. (SO1)*

*“We are still reviewing the current curriculum and we can revise it according to when it is needed. The curriculum is still a work in progress. We still need to include guiding principles of MIB, the learning outcomes and the teaching strategies to include the supplementary document that ECCE Unit is using to implement changes in teaching practice.... For now, we wait and observe to see if the approach works then we can include it in the revised version of the curriculum”. (SO2).*

*“Before 2010, teachers cannot afford to do one-on-one teaching or concentrate on providing high quality learning for children because the teacher is alone. The only classroom management which they can adopt is doing rote learning as it is easy to manage every child. They give the children the same worksheet because they don’t have a teacher’s assistant”. (SO1)*

*“The mind map, showcase and project approaches were introduced to move the teachers away from providing rote learning and towards more open-ended questions for the children. This will help the children to think independently and be confident enough to talk”. (SO1)*

### **5.37. Awareness of teachers’ challenges**

The senior officers are aware of the issues challenging the teachers as they try to implement changes; hence the reason for the ECCE Unit to provide training at the very basic foundation level for the teaching Pra. The two respondents are aware that most of the Pra teachers are untrained and understand the programmes to upgrade the teachers are limited. Therefore, both officers’ units deliver training for teachers.

*“We provide capacity building programmes for teachers... and we provide the very basic training from making lesson plans to introducing different types of teaching styles for Pra” (SO1)*

*“We do provide briefings every year to Pra teachers about the Pra curriculum and we have highlighted the changes like recently the use of phonics approach... we provide the workshop on phonics for the teachers...to help them in their teaching... we also tell the teachers during our training sessions*

*to use their creativity in manipulating the teaching aids and lesson delivery to make it fun”. (SO2)*

### **5.38. Challenges in implementing change**

Resources were mentioned by both SO1 and SO2 as no longer to be referred as challenges in implementing change. SO1 explained that they have brought in and provided resources in many forms from books to classroom equipment, such as furniture and learning materials. SO2 on the other hand also mentioned that the department has provided teachers with book references to be used as guides for teachers to help them teach creatively.

*“We have provided resources, we also provided them with textbook references for them to refer to if they are out of ideas for any hands on creative work. We have provided resources and the training for the teachers as 50%, the rest of the 50% is up to the teachers on how they want to plan and deliver their teaching in their creative ways. We only provide the training and resources as guides and the teachers should not be just limited to that. It depends on their attitude towards it”. (SO2)*

*“Resources are no longer a challenge as with the budget provided for Pra we have brought in materials for their use from furniture to learning materials. I think the biggest challenge is to change the attitudes of certain... some teachers. Changing their attitudes is challenging but we are not giving up. We do not give up on them, we monitor, we call them in when necessary and provide guidance by mentoring them”. (SO1)*

*“School leadership is a challenge as well. You can change attitudes if you start monitoring. If the principals do not monitor their teachers and classroom conditions, then lack of monitoring from school leaders is also a challenge and attitude problem” (SO1).*

SO1 is faced with challenges of teachers not wanting to change their practice but argued there is evidence of change in classroom layout.

*“Some teachers still don’t want to change their teaching practice but when you look at the classroom, they have started changing some areas, but you can tell it looks like it is not whole hearted”. (SO2)*

### **5.39. Teachers’ attitudes**

Issues on attitudes of teachers are divided into two categories; attitudes from those who are: a) trained, and b) untrained. Firstly, we focus on the trained teachers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the trained teachers are teachers who have gained an ECE professional qualification. These teachers have undergone rigorous and intensive training at the UBD and have done teaching practicum and attended courses in ECE over more than a year.

For these teachers to not implement the change, it goes back to the attitude of not wanting to know.

*“Teachers’ attitudes, their level of commitment. No matter how much training or support we provide, if the teachers are not implementing the change then I go back to their attitude... Teachers attitude...commitment...level of commitment”. (SO1)*

*When you happen to observe a case of inappropriate behaviour, that is where I focus on attitudes of the teacher as having no passion towards the teaching and if the teacher is a trained teacher, it is merely for the sake of a qualification. If the teacher is untrained, then there must be a reason, maybe no passion or no awareness on children’s learning development”. (SO1).*

*“There is no reason for the teachers to say that they don’t know, unless they do not want to know. If they don’t want to know, they won’t know... changing teachers mind set is not easy”. (SO2)*

#### **5.40. Support**

The support provided by both officers’ departments involved monitoring in terms of school visits with persistent follow-ups. For example, if they noticed a teacher is in need of help to conceptualise his or her understanding of the changes required in class, the teacher is guided by ‘holding his or her hand’. This means that the officers guided the teachers in structuring his/her room, and then will pay another visit in two weeks to see how that teacher is progressing. Next, they look at the teacher’s teaching style and, if needed, will introduce some approaches that the teacher can use. Although both SO1 and SO2 have created an open- door policy for their departments, the teachers do not take advantage of this offer; they do not ask questions or approach the departments.

*“We also come and visit schools, and observe. We explain further if they have problems’. (SO2)*

*“We come to schools, we are very persistent, we repeatedly visit schools and the teacher whom we think needs support in teaching. We monitor her, observe her progress. That is our way to ensure sustainable change. We do not give up on them, we monitor, we call them in when necessary and provide guidance by mentoring them”. (SO1)*

*“We welcome teachers to come directly to us and ask us for help with any doubts they have in their teaching. We also try to explain further when whenever we do visits or training”. (SO2)*

*“We informed the teachers of our office phone numbers, informed them that our office has an open-door policy, they can come anytime. If they do not want to deal directly with us, they can refer to their Pra Committee. Although we*

*kept mentioning this every time, that we can also provide small group training for the teachers if they need. With the open-door policy, none came and they didn't ask questions during workshops". (SO1).*

The Pra teachers are provided with their own Pra school committee according to school zones. The Pra school committees consist of teachers from other schools within the identified same school zone area with those who has been identified by the ECCE Unit to be able to lead and mentor the teachers within their school zones. These mentors also act as a focal person of reference if there is a need to clarify any matters pertaining to the teaching and learning of Pra. The Pra teachers meet regularly with their Pra school committees. The set up of the Pra committee was also considered beneficial by both SO1 and SO2 who suggested the committees should be teachers' points of reference if they did not want to deal directly with their units. These Pra Committees are set up to provide further support for the teachers.

*"Nowadays, the Pra teachers have their own Pra committee to refer to if they need support. They can also come directly to our department or the ECCE Unit". (SO2)*

*"We identified initially 11 master trainers and then they trained further around 21 teachers, then we set up the Pra Committee for teachers to refer to and these master trainings acts as mentors". (SO1)*

#### **5.41. Characteristics of an ideal teacher**

When SO1 and SO2 were asked for their perceptions regarding the characteristics of an ideal teacher involved in implementing the changes in the preschool; both mentioned 'passion'.

*"First, I have always dreamed of having passionate teachers...You have to be passionate then all the positive traits will come in. Second, the teacher should be committed. Third, trained with good high quality training, rigorous training. Highly trained teachers are different from highly qualified teachers. There is a saying that highly qualified is better but to me that is not the case. If you are highly trained, you have gone through the training rigorously and the training you get, determines the quality of your delivery. So to me, we need highly trained teachers who are still loving and committed". (SO1)*

*"The trained early childhood teachers as we observed some do not have passion. Sometimes those who are qualified are only in for the sake of the qualification. There are untrained teachers who we have observed are doing remarkably well and very enthusiastic towards their teaching. If you don't love children, then it will be a problem as you might end up treating the children inappropriately like getting mad over small matters. So for teachers to implement the changes ideally, the teacher should love the children, be passionate in teaching, trained as it is an advantage to the teacher so they*

*know about children's development; creative teachers so they know how to implement the changes, and can accept changes. This is because no matter how much we introduce and provide support, if their mind set they do not want to change, they won't change. Then the teachers cannot be alone they should be willing to collaborate with other teachers and finally doing things whole heartedly". (SO2)*

#### **5.42. Summary of the senior officers' interview findings**

The findings from the senior officers' interviews revealed that there are good intentions towards the need for change. Their comments also showed their awareness of the challenges that the teachers faced, which in turn caused them to provide the support extended to the setting up of Pra Committees; the attitudes of the teachers were also highlighted by the officers as being central to the implementation of the prescribed changes. All these points will be discussed in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### 6.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 aims to provide a conceptualisation of findings for this research project, titled: “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study”. It attempts to explain the complex constructs emerging from the findings of this research that were obtained through the adoption of a mixed methods approach to data collection which comprised of: a) survey, b) observation, c) interview and d) document analysis. This chapter will also discuss and triangulate the findings presented in Chapter 5, in order to create an understanding of the complex processes of changes in teaching and learning that are currently happening in Brunei’s preschool classrooms.

This chapter is organised by presenting the discussion according to the respective research questions, as follows:

1. What are the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool education system?
2. In what ways are Brunei government preschool teachers responding to these changes?
3. How do the Brunei government preschool teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, in organising the environment, and in implementing the curriculum?
4. How do the Brunei government preschool children perceive their learning experiences?
5. What are the Ministry of Education officers’ perspectives regarding teachers and children, in monitoring the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools?

### 6.2. Demographic data

Before we go into the discussion of the findings of Chapter 5, allow me to recall the demographic data of this study which has been presented earlier. The respondents of the study are 123 Pra teachers (97% female respondents) from across the four districts in Brunei, who provided information via an open-ended survey. 28% of the respondents are between 50-59 years of age, indicating that just over a quarter of the respondents are already heading towards retirement, as they are aged between 55-60 years old. Just over

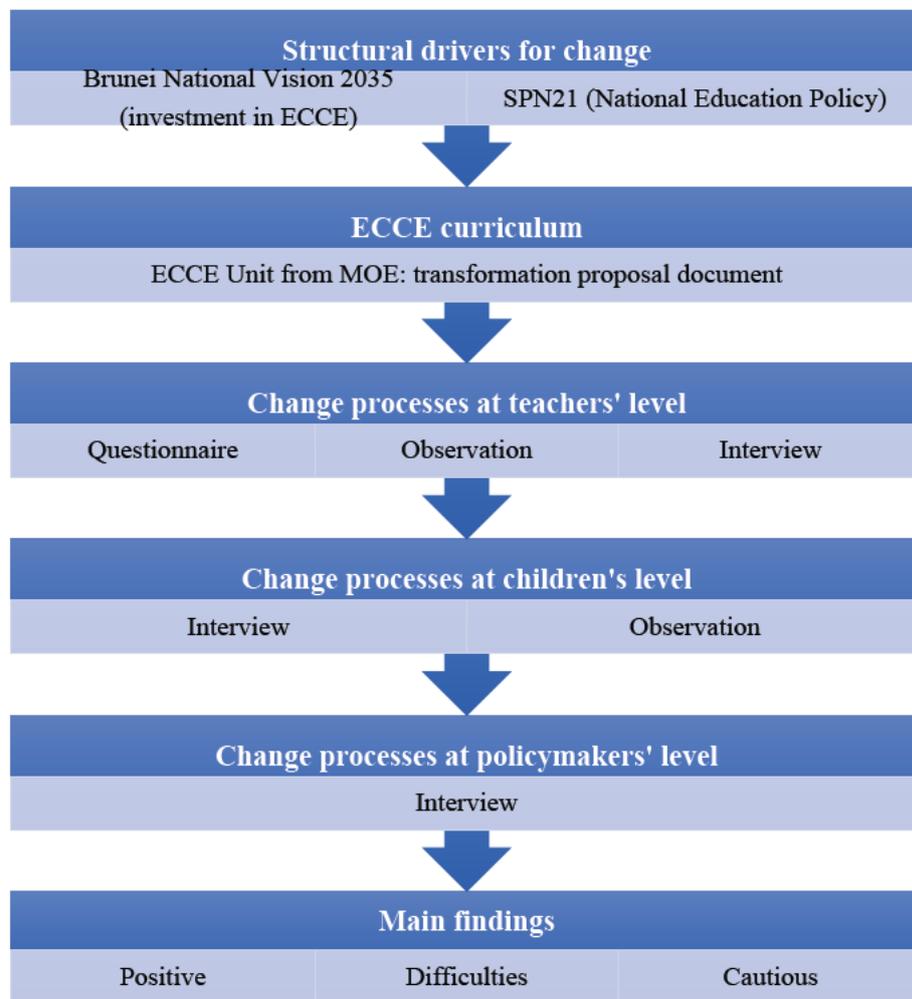
another quarter (27%) of the teachers are aged between 30 and 39 years; with an average of 9 years teaching experience at the preschool level. This is followed by 24% of teachers aged 40 to 49 and lastly, 22% are between 20 and 29 years old. Of the 123 teachers, only 40% are trained teachers specialising in early childhood education in the preschool system. Therefore, alarmingly 60% of teachers in the preschool system can be classified as ‘untrained’, with a non-specialised early childhood qualification. This rather unsatisfactory situation means that there is a pressing need to train 60% of the teachers who only have non-specialised early childhood qualifications. The data is further endorsed by four female preschool teachers, via the use of classroom observations and interviews. Also interviewed were eight preschool children (six boys and two girls) who gave their views about schooling and their learning experiences. Also obtained were interview contributions from two female senior officers who offered policymakers’ perspectives regarding the early childhood educational changes.

### **6.3. The change drivers and processes in the Brunei government preschool education system**

A series of major transformations introduced into the Brunei government preschool education system began with the structural drivers for change. The major transformations have been triggered by aspiring to implement the Brunei National Vision 2035, which focuses significant attention on educational strategy by investing in early childhood education in Brunei (refer to Section 2.4). The other driver of change is the National Education Policy of SPN21, which was derived from the Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plan 2007-2011, designed to include flexible curricula for all levels, in order to accommodate children’s needs as learners. The Brunei preschool curriculum is embedded with SPN21, where it brings further changes towards improving the teaching and learning experiences for all students, including those in preschool. The Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plan, 2012-2017, has prioritised the improvement of teaching and learning in Early Childhood Care and Education. This initiative, in turn, led to the formation of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit at the Ministry of Education. This ECCE Unit now acts as a catalyst responsible for supervising the changes in Brunei’s preschool education, with the laudable intention of improving the quality of teaching and learning in Brunei preschools. Under the ECCE, another policy driver was the supplementary policy document on “Transforming the Preschool Education Landscape in Brunei Darussalam, 2013”. This publication drives

the main transformation of Brunei preschool education, as it has introduced major changes to the preschool landscape to help achieve the pertinent objectives set out in SPN21. The supplementary policy document introduced was actually a document that is still at the ‘proposed’ stage; however, it has been approved by relevant authorities. The supplementary document provided brief explanations on the initiated changes introduced about the project approach, mind mapping and other learner-oriented matters, as teaching and learning methods. The document is quite brief, but the content of the proposal is delivered via major training through continuous nationwide professional development overseen and run by the ECCE Unit. It is important to note that this document is not transparent to, or easily accessed by, the teachers who have not been given a copy. So, even if they were able to refer to the intended required changes outlined in the curriculum document, they would not be able to trace the new reforms. The reforms introduced are like a ‘hidden curriculum’, as teachers can only review the reforms from their training packs. This transformation document could have been shared with the teachers by making it a more descriptive and teacher friendly publication for them to refer to. The concept of ‘curriculum’ is important because any curriculum document carries power, as it can be seen as the authoritative voice of the government prescribing what is expected. At this stage of the discussion, I am showing how the change processes act in certain ways in an attempt to drive the changes that the government wants. However, it may be that the responsible ECCE Unit officers are not leaving enough space for teacher agency; or perhaps teacher agency is not well understood in Brunei. What are the teachers’ rights, roles and responsibilities; do they feel empowered by the curriculum or do they feel that they don’t have very many choices about how they organise their practice?

The series of major transformations in the early childhood education landscape in Brunei begins from the structural drivers for change, as illustrated in Figure 6.1 below.



**Figure 6.1. The structural drivers for change**

Figure 6.1 illustrates how change is not only driven by a main curriculum document, but also through the explanatory documents or supplementary documents produced to offer support for curriculum guidance. While some of the concepts are shaping change, others are preventing it. So, we have the structures where the government is providing the curriculum: the ECCE Unit, under the Ministry of Education, is providing both additional guidance as well as training programmes. The structural drivers are influencing the following structures: a) the policy framework for early childhood education, b) the training and universities, especially the teacher training faculty; the Sultan Hassanal Bolkihah Institute of Education (SHBIE), Universiti Brunei Darussalam. We also have the process features relating to: i) how the teachers themselves are adapting to the required changes in their own ways, ii) the children's views and iii) the senior policymaking officers' views on the processes of change. These features are showing us that early childhood education is on the agenda in Brunei, as it is now part of a wider vision for social change; the investment being justified through and by a

wider social vision. Therefore, the structural drivers for change sit above the Brunei 2035 Vision, as well as relating to SPN21.

#### **6.4. Delivery model of change**

This section will focus on the delivery model of change that has brought a series of major transformations into the Brunei preschool education system. The model is derived from the data collected and the analysed data to generate the theory of the delivery model of change via the grounded theory approach.

The delivery model of change sees the ECCE Unit delivering training sessions to the teachers, through a series of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) events. The teachers then deliver lessons, informed by the new curriculum, to the children. We also have the curriculum document, and the ‘supplementary proposal guidance document’ to support the ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ approach. This is an example of how guidance or specification of these powerful concepts needs to be given to teachers. It is difficult for that document to bring about change in the curriculum without more detailed specification of what the ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ approach actually means in the reality of the Brunei preschool classroom context. Even so, effecting change is problematic because three fifths (60%) of teachers are not trained in specialised early childhood education. It therefore seems that 60% of the preschool teachers are in need of retraining to upgrade their academic qualifications. Since SHBIE has become a Graduate School in 2008, there is no higher education institution in Brunei to provide the platform for undergraduate degrees or certification for early childhood education specialisation. So, there is a gap in terms of the market, and that is why, when the MOE introduced that proposal, they took the initiative that they themselves are retraining their teachers nationwide through a series of CPD sessions, without considering whether those teachers were trained or untrained. Attending CPD sessions does not provide formal academic certification that gives credit to a qualification; the teacher merely receives a participant’s certificate.

In order to identify the type of CPD delivery model in implementing the changes in the Brunei Pra education, I refer back to Kennedy’s (2014) spectrum of CPD models which is mentioned in Chapter 3, Figure 3.5. From reading the supplementary policy document on “Transforming the Preschool Education Landscape in Brunei Darussalam,

2013”, initially the CPD delivery model seems to fall into the transformative change model. This is due to the early observations on changes introduced from a daily lesson plan changed to a weekly lesson plan in the form of mind maps. The change of the children every term, the introduction of the project approach, showcase and so forth has also contributed to my initial identification of a transformative change model. However, as observed during the implementation stage, the delivery model of change has changed and now sits between the transmission and transitional change process; the cascade model and distributed leadership model of change are used to facilitate the roll-out of the changes in practice. This is the stage when the ECCE Unit identified their trained teachers as master trainers or mentors to provide training and support to the untrained teachers, according to their school zones. The master trainers are graduate leaders who have been identified to increase levels of professionalism in the areas of early childhood education and care; an initiative which is similar to England’s efforts to change the early years sector (Payler and Locke, 2013; Payler and Waters, 2015). The change initiatives are now also part of the responsibility of the mentors to help initiate the implementation of the required changes. Subsequently, the distributed change model shifts to a cascade model, as the initiated changes are adopted and adapted differently by the teachers, according to their own beliefs and practices. It is important to remember that different cultural understandings of the changes will create different discourses that shape interpretations of the policy, as that policy is moved from theory across to practice.

The model of change earlier identified in the change processes of the Brunei preschool education aligns with a similar model of teacher change offered by Guskey (2002), as mentioned in Figure 3.4. Guskey’s (2002) model of teacher change is similar to the preceding models, as it looks at changes initiated through CPD; then it considers the changes in teachers’ classroom practices, followed by focusing on the changes in students’ learning outcomes. Finally, Guskey looks towards the change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. In relation to my observation findings, the four teachers’ practice in class showed that the teachers have not yet reached the point where they can or even wish to change their beliefs and attitudes.

Transformation means the system changes, the teachers’ beliefs and attitudes change and the children’s learning outcomes change. That would summarise the ideal: a whole

transformation, process. But what the data in this study show is that the macro levels of international reform agendas have their own particular understanding of transformation. However, at the meso national policy level involving the SPN21 and the ECCE Unit change initiatives, and the micro level of things that occur in preschools, classrooms and schools, the situation tends to become fractured, incoherent or inconsistent; a development that seems to be happening in Brunei. At the meso level, the teachers are provided with what may be described as 'patchy' (brief) training and there is no consistent top-up of training, to further deepen and reinforce the concepts. Due to the strong stream of Western ideas coming into the Pra curriculum, it seems that transformation at the meso and micro levels involves quite a lot of cultural change. This perspective relates back to Jabri (2012), cited earlier in Section 3.9, whereby the nature of change is unique in its context, and each context is in an on-going state of instability, thereby having an impact on the stakeholder receivers of change, who in this study are the teachers. This challenge involves teachers trying to take on board the idea of the learning centres, the showcase and the project approach. Unfortunately, the data analysed from this study indicate a theory that emerges whereby none of these ideas are being used in the ways that were intended; a judgement that applies to the 'mind map' concept as well. Referring to the findings of this study, structures of educational change need to have a cultural element, as identified by Colwell et al. (2015). This cultural element is significant because there are some Western ideas being introduced into the Brunei context and the teachers' ideas about teaching, children and childhood. The issue of 'not taking the cultural context into account' has encouraged this fracturing and the inconsistency of implementing the changes introduced at the meso and micro levels. It has been argued in depth that change is needed, particularly directed towards Brunei's preschool teaching culture, and especially the teachers' own practices. However, it must be recognised that whilst experts, and those in authority, want to change the teachers' beliefs, should those teachers not believe in the changes being suggested, then those changes will not happen. In this study, the teachers appear to be only culturally adapting to the changes and confining any movement to the surface level. This situation is unsatisfactory because transformational change needs to access deep levels of adaptation as mentioned by (Li, 2015, p. 436) in Section 3.12, who demonstrated that transformational leadership has an impact on teachers' willingness to accept or consider educational changes. This current study's findings reveal that Brunei is only at the surface level of adaptation. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that there is

no reward system or acknowledgement for the teachers who have implemented the changes, such as recognition, and therefore arguably there is no motivation for them to act.

As mentioned in Section 3.9, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) presented a four component framework to understand the processes of change. The second component in this study is the teacher as a person, highlighting that human beings are highly variable in nature as they have their own sets of beliefs. Furthermore, the transition stage that teachers go through conflicts with the teachers own set of beliefs and dealing with the challenges coming from a new set of ideas takes time, as mentioned by Bridges (2009) and Fullan (1992) in Section 3.9 of this study. It takes time as the challenges are unique to each teacher's own context; hence, the reason why my findings on the teachers' ways of implementing the changes also vary. The teachers in my study mentioned they understood the changes required by the MoE. However, it was observed that although the teachers changed their classroom practice in terms of the physical rearrangements, for example of learning corners, they did little else. By referring to the dimensions of change perspective (Fullan, 2007), the teachers were implementing the changes and some aspects of teaching styles, making 'concrete' their dimension of change in the teaching and learning processes. However, those same teachers are avoiding changing their beliefs and practices; a reluctance which portrays their attitudes towards the prescribed changes. The findings of this study demonstrate that the teachers in this research are only implementing the required educational changes at the 'cosmetic' or surface level. This lack of depth also relates to Fullan's (2007) arguments on the complications with the three dimensions of implementing change, mentioned in Section 3.9 earlier.

#### **6.5. Brunei government preschool teachers' ways of responding to the changes**

Findings from the 123 survey respondents have provided a nationwide insight into how the preschool teachers are responding to the required educational changes. There are three themes that reflect the ways that the preschool teachers are responding to the changes: 1) positively, 2) having difficulties, and 3) being cautious.

### *6.5.1. Positively*

The survey findings have revealed that 97% of the teachers agree with the changes introduced into the Brunei preschool education system. They were mostly supporting the initiative and reported that they understood the need for change, as explained in Section 5.3. The teachers are also positive in their responses towards managing the areas of change by implementing the practice gradually, in stages. This perspective is further seen in the findings from the observation sessions and the interviews with the teachers; they were not resisting the changes, but they are researching the value of change towards their own classroom practice. The teachers are adopting the recommended changes in stages; gradually adapting them for use in their classrooms. They are also attending the training provided by the Ministry of Education. The survey indicates that the teachers understand that the intentions that the policy brings are good, which resulted in them being positive towards the idea of change, by relating it to the outcome of improving teaching and learning for the children. This positivity brings us back to the literature regarding teachers and their beliefs; when they are trying to change their practice, they stick to their values regarding the best interests of the children and these are inseparable (Rodd, 2015; Guskey, 2010). Another positive area that emerges from the questionnaire is the support coming from the ECCE Unit, the schools and parents. The research also found that majority of the teachers are supportive towards the changes and this perspective indirectly links to how the teachers are also positive towards the intended changes for preschool education. This support is further echoed in the observation findings and interviews relating to both the teachers and the policy makers.

### *6.5.2. Having difficulties*

Among the many initiatives of change, the 123 teachers have identified three major changes in their classrooms which are: i) mind mapping in teaching, ii) the project approach and iii) the showcase idea. It is understood from the survey that some concerns about perceived difficulties arose regarding the high ratio of children to the adults, and the teachers pressure to ensure the children can read, write and count due to those changes. The teachers are also facing difficulties in handling the big numbers of children in classes, without teachers' assistants to offer them any support. Currently in the Brunei government preschools, there are no permanent teachers' assistants; those helpers who do exist are on a volunteer basis and therefore not tied to any agreement or

obligation. Hence, even if a teacher is fortunate enough to have an assistant, the helper may not stay longer than three months, as these volunteers are mostly students waiting for their GCE O-Level and A-Level results. This deficit problem was also observed from the interviews and observation findings, where teachers confirmed this issue. The teachers also emphasised the need for assistants to help them with the special needs children in their classes, as Brunei classrooms are using the inclusion approach. Sometimes a teacher would have more than one special needs child in their classroom and this situation aggravates that teacher's challenges even further. The difficulties raised are a real concern as they may become a barrier preventing the intended changes being carried out by the affected teachers.

Another identified difficulty is the handling or organisational management of the children, as the children are moved to a different class at the end of each term. This 'upheaval' contributes to a lack of continuity of teaching and learning and adds problems to any attempts at monitoring the children's progress. Teachers, children and even some parents find the transformation of the classroom to be confusing. This view is highlighted in the observation on the way the policymakers implemented the changes; a view further elaborated in the 'challenges' section on 'Communication updates in regulating amendments to the intended preschool changes' of this chapter.

### *6.5.3. Being cautious*

The teachers were also cautious in their responses, as they were trying to be 'polite' when communicating with the researcher. In Brunei, where most of the population is Malay and Muslims, and governed by the ideology of the MIB concept, it is impolite for a person to speak their mind openly without taking into consideration how the other person might feel. Shaming is also not acceptable in the culture and being respectful towards others is considered as high value. Hence, I noticed that the teachers were cautious with their answers and the ways they viewed the prescribed changes.

The setting for the questionnaire-based survey was a CPD event, in the presence of some senior officers who gave permission for me to distribute my survey to the teachers before they continued with their CPD. The senior officers were in sight preparing their CPD materials while the respondents were answering the survey. The senior officers did not even walk around to look at the survey or talk with the teachers, as they had already

been informed by the researcher about the confidentiality of the data, and this information was fully respected. Reassurance, as stated in Section 4.8.2, had to be done verbally by the researcher who reinforced to the respondent teachers that the survey would not be seen by any of the senior officers. Hence, the answers suggested that my presence and involvement may have influenced the teachers' responses to be cautious, as the answers seem too polite to agree to the changes. This 'cautious' or 'polite' data set is in conflict with information from the memo observation in Section 5.23.1, where I had the chance to attend one meeting where the teachers came to discuss their issues regarding the required changes for the preschool. The teachers were honest and open in their comments, stating that they were experiencing some tensions in the way their beliefs conflicted with the new required practice. This dissonance relates to the literature Section 3.5, which addresses teachers' beliefs. No matter how many CPD programmes the teachers go through, if they cannot change their beliefs then the desired new practice falls into the trap of stopping or going backwards. The teachers will seek protection by retreating into their comfort zones, based on their own familiar styles of teaching (Rodd, 2015; Brock, 2013; Fisher and Wood, 2012; Guskey, 2010). The survey also revealed the dimension of caution, whereby not only were they being overly polite, but the teachers managed to balance that by including their suggestions on how the implementation should be delivered gradually in phases.

## **6.6. The ways teachers use their capacity and knowledge in planning the teaching and learning experiences of the preschool children, organising the environment, and implementing the curriculum**

The classroom observation and interviews with the four preschool teachers assisted in eliciting the main context of how change processes are implemented in classroom practice. Three themes emerged: i) classroom practice; ii) support and iii) challenges.

### **6.7. Classroom practice**

Two sub-themes emerged under classroom practice: i) classroom environment and ii) pedagogy.

#### *6.7.1. Classroom environment*

The four classroom settings changed as the teachers tried to include the learning corners according to each class size. This is evident from the classroom layout provided by the

teachers illustrating 'before the transformation' and 'after the transformation'. Although the changes are not standardised due to the different classroom layouts and sizes, there is evidence from the observation of attempts at organising the classrooms to be more conducive to pre-school students' learning by having the learning corners. This initiative is also evidence that the teachers are, to a degree, embracing the changes. The four teachers mentioned that their classroom arrangements kept changing accordingly.

The data from the observation and children's interviews revealed that access to the resources at the learning corner and the classroom as a whole is not consistently available. The study found, from my observations of the classrooms, that the teachers had prepared suitable resources for the children to be available at hand, such as stationeries, puppets and storybooks. Information from the children revealed the opposite; they offered clearer, more honest insights into the issue of reading the classroom. Two untrained teachers in this study have open access to their resources where, from observation, children freely used the resources without the need to ask for permission. The two trained teachers were observed as having some restrictions to the resources, as not all areas are open access, as revealed by the children's interviews detailed in sections starting Section 5.31.1 until Section 5.32.3. The teachers claimed that they provided open access to their classrooms' resources but the children's interviews contradicted this claim. Hence, this is another example where teachers are trying to be compliant to present a positive view of how they have adapted to the change, but are perhaps being 'somewhat economical with the truth'. The teachers in this study were perhaps answering the questions politely without being willing to explain why access to the resources was restricted. The findings also portray that the learning corners of the two trained teachers in this study are merely for display purposes, rather than for actual use by the children; perhaps to satisfy the ECCE Unit's monitoring. This lack-of-use case is reflected in my classroom observation where, to ensure the observation finding was valid, I cross checked the data with the teachers' interview and the other stakeholders in the learning process: the children themselves. In this way, the research has given voice to the children on how their environment is set up, and what are their everyday experiences. The children's voices bring into question whether the intended improvements in learning and teaching will come about if the changes are applied inconsistently or not at all.

### *6.7.2. Pedagogy*

There are undoubtedly tensions in the teachers' interpretations of the changes. Hence, it is the responsibility of each teacher to act upon the learning offered in the CPD training, by identifying the suitability of the changes to their own classroom culture and ethos. The teachers are indirectly invited to focus on the changes by using action research as a tool to evaluate whether changes can be implemented and whether those changes need some adaptation. The teachers are focusing on the "constructivist attitude of the children actively exploring their environment as a way of acquiring meaning from experience and engaging new dispositions for new learning experiences" (Georgeson et al., 2015, p. 1874). However, the research findings indicate that the pedagogical approaches used by the teachers are not consistent with this aspiration.

The style of teaching is mostly teacher-structured and centred, informed by directed activities. There were no choices given to the children on which activities they wanted to do first. There were similarities in the teaching styles of the four teachers. They all started with the mat activity and explanations, with some activities being done at the mat area. Then they moved to their tables for group or individual tasks. The sessions were concluded by the children and teacher going back to the mat area to end the lesson. Although there is emphasis on the learning through play approach, based on my observations the lessons are still quite rigid, although some game-based activities were now being included. However, these game-based activities are also still structured and heavily teacher-directed. The concept of 'child-centredness' is not fully adopted yet in the four teachers' practice for pragmatic reasons, as some have revealed the constraints that limit one adult/teacher with a high number of children in the room, without support from a valued teacher's assistant. The other constraint is the attention towards the children's academic progress, judged by being able to read, count and write independently. Although the showcase idea has been adopted, the teachers usually go to the extreme by preparing it like a mini concert. This approach is regrettable because the intention of the initiated change is for the classrooms to be open for parents to visit, walk around and understand the activities their children are doing at school, so they can also be more involved in their children's learning. Similarly, the use of the project approach in Brunei is not how it is viewed in the Western model; instead it is more like an adapted version where the teachers still direct the children on what to do and how to do it. Creativity is not really nurtured as, from my observations, the children rely on the

teachers' examples, rather than being encouraged to think of creating their own ideas. The mind map approach to learning is being implemented to varying degrees. However, some children are still at the stage of having difficulties in learning to read. In such cases the teachers could have included the illustrative picture next to the word, to slowly develop the child towards becoming an independent reader.

Although all four teachers in my study have changed their classrooms to a greater or lesser extent, not all of them have changed their practice; for example, they were still doing whole class teaching, with children on the mat and the learning corners not being used in the way SPN21 thinks they should be. Most of the learning takes place at the mat area and the table/work area is used when there are worksheets or written activities as part of the lesson. So, there is a mismatch between how the classroom should be used to support different pedagogical approaches, but with the teachers choosing to stick with what they know and what has really worked for them in the past. If we were to look at the learning corners they have created, from my observation, the reason why they did not use the learning corners is probably because of the size of the learning corner itself. The ways these corners have been set up are similar to a reading corner, small and for children. For example, if there were 15 children in the class, we cannot fit the children in that corner as it is not big enough. Equally, if differentiated learning activities were on the agenda, the corners are not appropriate to do a large group activity due to the inadequate size of those learning corners. The corners were suitable for about five children, but certainly not 15 or 25. Therefore, the teachers are setting up the corners but not using them fully or even at all. This is an example from my findings on the relationship between the policy in theory and what was actually happening in the classrooms. The example reflects the dislocation between what should happen, according to the policy, and what actually occurs in the classroom. From my observation, the learning corners are mostly used to display children's work; the most functional one from my observation is the literacy corner, where the reading materials are located and displayed. As observed, some children came freely to take books. On the other hand, if we were to look at those other learning corners in the classroom, only a few children went to the creativity table to work on something, as the other areas of the learning corners in the classroom are too small to work at. The activities that the teachers provided for the children were also similar and not differentiated according to the development needs of each child, meaning the children are all doing the same

activities and are 'expected' to finish at the same time. These findings confirm the style of teaching evident in Brunei's schools, which is still heavily reliant on teacher-directed and teacher-led instructions. By referring back to the Pra curriculum, it is intended that children can go to the learning corners in small groups of up to 5 children; they can work individually or in groups at the creativity corner and they can do self-chosen work. That is how the new teaching-learning model should be. However, both the supplementary transformation document and the curriculum document fail to provide full or detailed explanations on the function of the required learning corners. The documents only list the initiative's expectations of classrooms having learning corners and then setting out the different types of those corners. The Pra curriculum moved on to list three outdoor learning corners that are ideally expected to be created. The policy is clearly telling teachers what to do and how they are expected to organise their classrooms. The policy gives explicit expectations on the types of pedagogical approaches required; however again, merely as listings with no detailed explanations being provided. The project approach is not mentioned in the curriculum specifically, but in the supplementary document. The curriculum document mentioned four types of teaching approaches: i) easiest to hardest, ii) cooperative approach, iii) learning through play and iv) the thematic approach. The policy document is giving characteristics for the types of pedagogy but not really explaining what it looks like within the environment. For example: i) provide a sample of a topic/theme; ii) carefully explain what is required in the lesson objective; iii) what to look for in a particular lesson; however, no such supporting information is supplied. All official communications appeared to be merely 'telling on the surface' about what was expected, leaving it open to the teachers' own interpretations of what those approaches were meant to be. Another problem identified is with the untrained teachers who have only attended the workshops, thereby producing another series of interpretations of what the changes are supposed to mean and involve. On the one hand, the policy tells teachers what they should be doing but the information is not specified in very much detail. This then reflects back to the interview of the senior officers; it appeared that one of them actually lacked the in-depth knowledge as to why the curriculum is mentioning some Western early childhood concepts. The curriculum was already designed and prepared when the officers took up their posts and were asked to initiate further revisions. What the study has shown is that when we have two trained teachers and two untrained teachers, they have some different and some similar responses to the policy document. This illuminates the

policy's good intentions in terms of promoting integrated teaching-learning approaches, child-centred learning, and play-based approaches. However, I did not see this in practice as a whole, and only observed limited versions of these prescribed models in action. No matter how much the ECCE wanted lessons to be child-centred, in my observation the lessons were still oriented towards teacher-directed learning, with the teacher instructing the students on what to do; a globally familiar model over the last one hundred years. Even when it comes to activities, the children were not given a choice of which activity they wanted to do first. For the two trained teachers it was the same pace of activity for all class members; however, the two untrained teachers did try to differentiate their students' learning activities. The lessons were still not offering choices for the children, as the teachers still provided the same tasks, still put the students into groups, and still directed them and rotated them after that. In terms of giving the children choices of which activity to do, there is very little choice as everything is quite formal, structured and teacher-directed. My observations of what happened in the classroom enabled me to interpret some of the difficulties and challenges the teachers faced; a situation that brings me back to my positionality as an interpretive researcher to present the interpretations of my data.

The reasons for the teachers' behaviour could have been influenced by my position at UBD. If the data collection had been carried out by somebody like a fresh student going into the field, then the teachers might have acted more naturally, or even more honestly, than with me as the researcher. However, my position as a researcher does give me the privilege to interpret what I am observing.

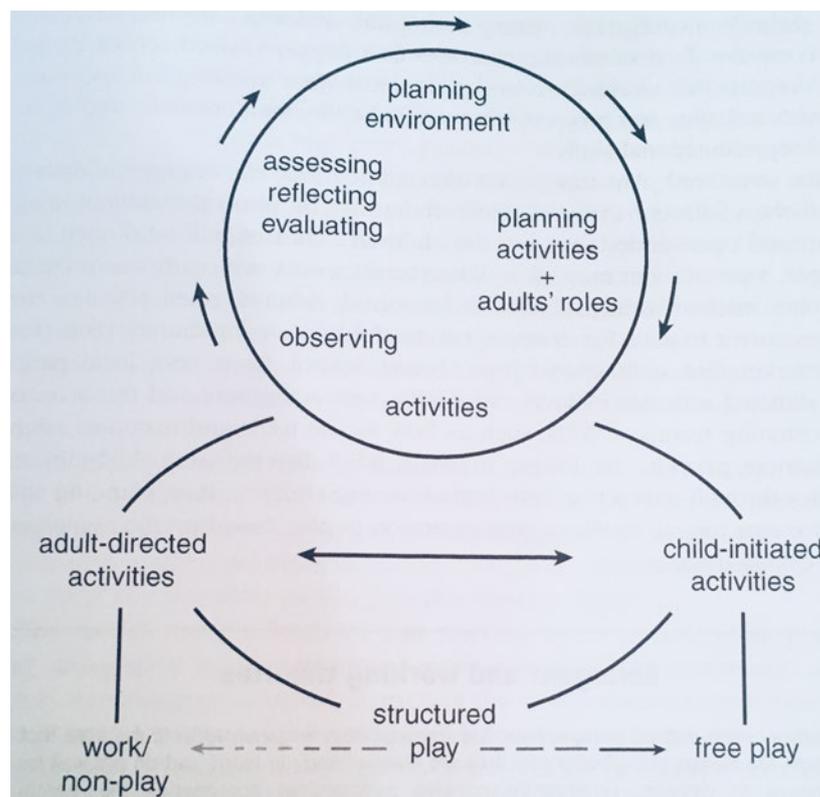
Policy has good intentions but is problematic, so below is presented some of the possible explanations of why the teachers are finding the policy difficult to work with:

- 1) Putting so many learning corners in the classroom does not leave very much space for the children's free choices.
- 2) It may be that it is not the teachers who are not implementing the policy, but the policy that contains too many things in it for it to be implemented.
- 3) The Western influence on ECE policy in Brunei may be excessive or inappropriate. This is because the culture and social traditions of the West are very different to the Brunei MIB philosophy culture.

- 4) There are local cultural influences on teachers, particularly with parents exerting pressure on those teachers, as revealed in both the survey and interview findings. This is another challenge for teachers in terms of developing the kinds of approaches that are promoted in the policy. Specifically there is pressure from parents, although their children are still at preschool level, who expect the teacher to already be teaching writing, reading and counting by the end of the preschool year, before their child goes up to Year 1. In some ways, the teachers have set up a classroom to enact pedagogical approaches that are promoted in the policy; however, what the teachers are actually doing is responding to many different influences. These influences include a) from parents, b) from the children and c) from the lack of space. The pressure to finish the syllabus and to be able to read, write and count are also illuminated in the findings of the questionnaire, interviews and observation. Although at the beginning of the curriculum it focused on the 'Fun Play and Learn More' approach, it also included expectations towards school readiness in literacy and numeracy skills which are reflected in the learning outcomes. Quite contradictory in the policy itself is where it talks about wanting to have a child-centred classroom model, with lots of fun and play but indirectly, towards the end, there is a sudden cut off to focus on the 3Rs. If we were to look at the Year 1 curriculum, it does not reintroduce or revisit phonics or numbers. They have presented the next academic requirements to be achieved and it is clearly assumed that children from the Pra classes are already competent with their letters, writing, reading and counting; an assumption that places yet more pressure upon the teachers and, of course, the children. We have a very well-intentioned policy here, but we have different policy narratives that are influencing the teachers. The teachers, as reported in the observation findings, are going with the safe narrative which is the formal work preparing the children for the 3Rs, making sure they are ready for school; in other words teacher-centred, old-style lessons rather than the policy-prescribed, child-centred model. This situation, in return, positions 'play', 'the learning corners', and 'the child initiated learning', all on the 'back burner', as the teachers get questioned on the children's reading, writing and counting performance and progress. So that is the teachers' understandable focus, as revealed from the interviews.

The nature of the preschool being in the same primary school building may have impacted on the preschool level, thereby focusing more towards adult-directed activities. Also, because the Pra is situated within the primary school building, when it comes to almost the end of the Pra term, the Year One teachers would usually check with the Pra teachers to find out whether the children are already able to read and write. If they are not up to that level, the teachers mentioned that they get blamed for “not teaching the children well enough”. The traditional performance pressure still exists for the Pra teachers, who are currently being pulled by these different influences. The Year One teachers are also tracking the pre-school students’ progress, as parents do not much care whether or not their children are able to socialise well; their main concern will always be “can my child read, write and count?” Pressure from the parents, as well as the school principal checking the lesson plans to ensure the teachers are heading towards students’ competence in the 3Rs, means the teachers are being pulled in different directions. These situations are examples of the interactions that interplay between the micro, meso and macro levels.

The SPN21, mentioned earlier in Section 2.13, cited the ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ approach. Reflecting on my findings, data suggests that what is actually happening is very rigid play. My observations looked into the way the classroom environments were set up, in order to establish whether the teachers were setting up the learning corners to actually allow for learning through play to happen. I referred to Wood’s (2013a) integrated curriculum and pedagogical approaches model, as shown in Figure 6.2 below. By referring to the model, it provides the teachers with the option to demonstrate “flexibility and responsiveness in their curriculum and pedagogical approaches” (Wood, 2013a, p. 68).



**Figure 6.2. The model of integrated curriculum and pedagogical approaches**  
**Source: Wood (2013a, p. 71)**

Wood (2013a) argues that there are different versions of educational play, and it seems that the teachers in this current research are keeping play very much under a teacher-directed, teacher-controlled model. Teachers tell the children which corners they can go to, which resources they can use, and they are not allowing freely chosen play other than when the children have finished their work. My data shows that this is not an integrated model of pedagogy; rather it is very much a model of educational play with an emphasis on teacher-directed, as opposed to child-initiated, activities. There is more game-based and whole-class teaching, hence the argument that play and the necessary freedom that goes with it, is not really there as everything is very structured and rigid. Children's freely chosen play does not really exist in my study. The teachers in my study do not have time to observe the children or understand what the children are doing in their freely chosen play time. The model of pedagogy, in spite of the policy changes, is still predominantly both teacher-directed and teacher-led; the teachers are using games but basically are doing so to achieve the learning outcomes the teachers want. There is a tension in the teachers as policy is supposed to be driving change, but the teachers do not have the knowledge and/or understanding regarding how to implement the changes that are required. It seems that they are making some adjustments, by using

games for example, but they are still keeping their core directed pedagogy based on the familiar teacher-directed model. There is no differentiated activity that goes on in the observed pre-school classes, no given choice of activity on what the children would like to do first. Therefore, if there are two activities going on at the same time, it is the teacher who tells the children which activity to do first and so the students do not really have any freedom of choice in terms of their learning. Since everything is provided by the teacher, and the students are so used to following instructions, perhaps it is understandable that during the children's interviews, the children were not really fluent with me. They are not used to people asking them what they like, because such a question is so contradictory to what the teachers do with them. Maybe it is also a cultural issue in Brunei, where children are not used to an adult asking them for their perspectives. However, when I asked the children, they gave me some useful insights as to their understanding of play, responses which did not match with what the teachers were saying about play in their classrooms.

The way the teachers implemented the project approach in this study is not how it is defined by Katz (1998). A project approach involves continuous learning, incorporating exploration of a topic, ongoing research and, towards the end of the topic, the children sharing what they know about it (Katz, 1998). However, the Bruneian version of continuous learning is very different, as reflected in the findings gathered from observation of the teachers. The Brunei version is carried out with the teacher directing the children on what needs to be covered, so opportunities of exploring the topic are limited, and the projects are teacher-planned, teacher-structured and very much teacher-directed, as opposed to the Western version of child-initiated exploration. This scenario indicates that the project approach version implemented by the four teachers in my study, seemed to be an adapted version to fit the teachers own cultural values in teaching and learning. I have read the CPD training documents and viewed the PowerPoint slides of the trainers; both are similar to how the West is talking about the project approach. However, when that model is adopted by the four teachers and implemented by them, it becomes a quite different approach. These four teachers have adapted the project approach to suit their own existing ways of understanding pedagogy. Therefore, in this research 'play' is being dealt with as a teacher-directed option. Equally, based on my observations the project approach, instead of being both a child-led and adult-led activity, is predominantly teacher-led. The adaptation is taking place

in classrooms according to the teachers existing sets of skills, knowledge and understanding. Therefore, teachers in this study are not changing their skills, knowledge and understanding; instead they are adapting policy to fit what they already know and what they are comfortable with. This somewhat troubling, albeit understandable, teacher situation is a manifestation of the fact that change is difficult, disturbing, unsettling and disruptive, as mentioned and discussed in Chapter 3.

## **6.8. Support**

Two sub themes emerge here for support: 1) teachers' assistants; and 2) schools, mentors and the ECCE Unit.

### *6.8.1. Teachers' assistants*

Teachers' assistants (TA) are also part of the initiated change in Brunei preschool education. They are mostly only available at the beginning of the year from January until April, as these assistants are student volunteers who are either waiting for job opportunities or waiting for their O/A Level results. Due to having no agreement on how many months they should be volunteering for, the temporary helpers can easily just leave their TA position if they wish to. This is where the observation and interview findings in my study showed that one trained teacher, Tina, at the time of the study had one temporary teacher's assistant. From my observations Tina did not use her teacher assistant very much as she mentioned in the interview that she did not want to become dependent on an assistant who may leave at anytime. However, Tina's observation findings conflict with her interview findings where she stated that one of the challenges in implementing the change is not having a full-time contracted teacher's assistant; Tina emphasised that she needed one. The other three teachers used their assistants by assigning tasks for them to help in the class. This arrangement calls for serious investment towards providing teachers' assistants, especially to classes that contain children with special needs. The presence of a teacher's assistant would help to provide a better learning and teaching experience. First, the needs of the children could be catered for, and also the teachers will have the continuity of support that they need for children of pre-school age. This situation also indirectly showed that one trained teacher in my study is unable to show her leadership skills in utilising the temporary teacher's assistant who was allocated to her class; an unsatisfactory experience for both teacher and volunteer. The teacher's assistant could have gained some skills and knowledge in

managing the children if Tina had been prepared to work with her assistant and make use of the volunteer; as opposed to a situation that could be viewed as a lost opportunity.

#### *6.8.2. Schools, mentors and the ECCE unit*

It is clear from the findings that there is an urgent need to provide support for the teachers' efforts as they attempt to implement the curriculum changes, and are continually trying to come to terms with what their learners need. The findings from the observations, interviews and survey have mentioned support given from schools, such as from principals and colleagues in terms of resources. Mentors for each respective school zone are available to provide a platform for discussion and training.

### **6.9. Challenges**

Teachers are trying to adapt to the required changes and to deliver these to the students while their own voices may be undermined or disregarded. The findings in Chapter 5 showed that there are challenges in terms of: 1) communication updates in regulating amendments to the intended preschool changes, 2) monitoring and 3) sustaining the intended preschool changes.

#### *6.9.1. Communication updates in regulating amendments to the intended preschool changes*

The decision-making style and the operational rule, through monitoring rather than producing memos about what has changed, has led to misunderstanding and conflict in classroom practices. This problem is echoed in the questionnaire, where teachers mentioned that their difficulty is the moving of children to another class at the end of each term. By the time I distributed the survey, I was informed that such practice is no longer part of the change. The teachers were already asked not to change their students each term due to the problems they faced. From the research evidence it is apparent that a lack of clarity regarding the intended changes has brought about several challenges. Conflicting messages resulted in inconsistency when trying to deliver the initiated changes, often leading to miscommunication between policy and practice, which then resulted in confusion amongst the teachers. Findings from the survey, classroom observation and interviews, showed that this miscommunication happens when some teachers are unable to attend some of the CPD sessions. Updates to some amendments are usually mentioned verbally during the briefing and training sessions of the CPDs.

As there are not many preschool teachers within one school, if they are absent from the CPD, they will not be informed of any amendments to the required changes. This problem is further confirmed by the interview notes taken when with the senior officers; they do not provide memos or circulate notices regarding retracted changes, but they do provide brief circulated notes on the initiated changes. Hence, some teachers who did not attend a session may not be informed of the latest changes and are therefore still practicing what has gone before, but has now been replaced. The way the changes are delivered in the beginning is seen as trial and error. This is also similar to the specialised rooms that were part of the change initiative but because some schools did not have a conducive setting, this option was also stopped. It is argued that the miscommunication could be avoided, or at least overcome, when teachers communicate amongst themselves when they meet at their Pra committee meeting. It was also revealed that some of the teachers' attitudes were acting as roadblocks to the initiated changes. For the trained teachers, perhaps they do not want to implement what they know; for the untrained teachers perhaps they do not implement the changes as they find them challenging and prefer to employ the safe practice of what they are used to in their classrooms. These 'secure' attitudes are reflected in the beliefs of the teachers, mentioned earlier in reference to Fullan (2007). It is also arguable that the support given was ample, to the extent of having Pra committees for their focal source, especially if the teachers do not want to ask a member of the ECCE Unit team for clarification concerning any implementation.

At the time this study was completed, Brunei preschool education was undergoing further changes, with the introduction of the Brunei Teacher Standards. Stable leadership from the ECCE Unit is also no longer present after the 'rigorous' implementation of the changes in Brunei preschool education, due to retirement. Change is now delivered by the other officers within the unit and the leader has not been replaced. This period without leadership has contributed significantly, albeit negatively, to the way change is sustained and monitored. Although the teachers continue to serve Brunei preschool education and are maintaining their roles as facilitators, they are not meeting as frequently as before within their school zones. Lack of leadership has brought a challenge, whereby the teachers are seen trying to achieve change under their own initiatives. This lack of leadership also highlights the conditions that are needed to ensure that changes are sustainable over time.

### *6.9.2. Monitoring*

The initiated changes were introduced through the supplementary document issued from the ECCE Unit mentioned earlier. The changes were then initiated through CPDs and identified mentors forming their Pra Committees according to the school zones. Monitoring by the ECCE Unit is from the checklist given for the teachers on their classroom settings, looking at how the teachers are teaching and how the students are working. The interviews with the senior officers revealed that there are times that they are not capable of monitoring all classroom practice, although they are the ones initiating the changes and who are supposed to be providing CPD and sufficient support towards implementing the changes. This difficulty is because the task is handled by a different department in the same Ministry of Education, which is the Department of Schools. Therefore, it is a member of the school inspectorate who will be the one responsible for observing and monitoring the quality of the teaching. However, I was informed by the senior officers that there was no school inspectorate specifically assigned to the ECE at the time the changes were implemented. The seat is still vacant, due to retirement, at the time of this study's data collection period. The stable leadership from the ECCE Unit earlier had access to schools. The other officers in the ECCE Unit and the Curriculum Development Department do not have the same direct authority to inspect schools unless they are ordered by their superiors. It is worth noting that in the beginning of the changes being implemented, there were rigorous school visits done as a way of monitoring the quality of implementing the changes in Brunei preschools. However, as a result of the lack of leadership, monitoring during and after policy implementation is fragmented.

In trying to identify the type of leadership that was available in the initial stage of the implementation of the changes in preschool education in Brunei, I referred to Li (2015), Parry (2011), Kilduff and Balkundi (2011), Ho (2012) and Harris (2004); all cited in Chapter 3 of my literature review on leadership. The stable leadership style that the ECCE Unit experienced is identified as transformational leadership, which involves various types of distributed leadership. In this study, the transformational leadership from the ECCE Unit senior officer has distributed leadership to the other three officers in the ECCE Unit and the two officers in Curriculum Development Department to initiate the implementation of changes through the CPDs. It is important to note here

that also these officers were given distributed leadership, authority and direct access to schools is only within the stable leadership. This is due to the high positions held as the Director of Schools and the Head of ECCE Unit. Then the distributed leadership is further shared with the recruited and identified trained teachers as master trainers or mentors to form Pra Committees distributed in their respective school zones. This model reflects Harris (2004) in that “successful heads recognise the limitations of a singular leadership approach” and leadership is “distributed through collaborative and joint working” (p. 560) as mentioned earlier in Section 3.12. Hence, the loss of the stable leadership also impacted on the distributed leaders’ strength in carrying out further changes and in monitoring the quality of implementation. This situation is seen as an inadequacy in the implementation of the Brunei preschool education changes, as change needs to be sustained and monitored to provide appropriate support for those in the classrooms; both the teachers and their students.

### *6.9.3. Sustaining the intended preschool changes*

Once change has been articulated and support has been given from the ECCE Unit, the Curriculum Development Department, and the mentors in the Pra Committees, regular discussions and checks in activities and messages need to be consistent to sustain the changes (Luecke, 2003). Such regular activities can help to support and sustain the changes introduced in the preschool.

To sustain the changes introduced to the Pra education system, I assessed the overall implementation of the changes by referring to Luecke (2003) regarding six essential activities for implementation in a change programme, as presented in Section 3.9 earlier. The six points have been adjusted to fit my research findings:

1. The recruitment of trained teachers as master trainers/mentors.
2. The mentors then have their own Pra Committee based on the school zones. Responsibility of implementing and sustaining change now also rests partly at the mentors. However, at this stage, challenges arise due to the ‘fast pace’ as perceived by the teachers, has diminished part of the mentors responsibility, as the teachers are in tension with their beliefs and are therefore slowing down the implementation process.
3. The teachers are having regular meetings with their Pra Committee to ensure the implementation of the initiated changes. The changes introduced were found to

be at least partly inconsistent (miscommunication) amongst teachers, regarding what had been implemented and what had already been superseded.

4. The changes implemented also seem as if piloted to all the government preschools in Brunei. This is because some the changes introduced during the implementation were not carried out when problems occurred during the initial implementation, such as the transition of children to a new class every term, and the use of specialised classes. The ‘enabling structures’, such as training, were provided, but not in-depth because the ECCE unit was not in a position to provide accreditation to the training; hence the brief and short nature of the CPDs. Feedback and identified challenges were discussed during CPD and Pra Committee meetings.
5. There is an absence of celebrating milestones or acknowledgements with the teachers, even when a small milestone is achieved, such as changing the classroom arrangement. Such reinforcements could indirectly reassure the teachers’ beliefs and confidence in delivering further required changes into practice.
6. In terms of communicating, the teachers were initially provided with information on the required changes by memo. At the delivery stage, any changes that were retracted due to their unsuitability were not communicated in print, only verbally.

Therefore, according to my findings, implementation of changes in the Brunei Pra education system showed that the implementation process itself is messy, and not straightforward. It is also emphasised that the changes introduced to the Pra education system are indeed founded on good intentions aimed at raising the quality of the ECCE.

In order for change to be sustained, Brunei preschool education is lacking in the celebration of milestones or a reward system. In terms of communication, the system still needs more attention to provide information circulation to all teachers in a printed format, rather than by verbal communication only.

Another important issue here is that change happens at different levels. The macro and meso level is the business of government and how change is conceptualised in relation to national and international policy drivers; issues which involve the Ministry of

Education, the ECCE Unit and the school inspectorate amongst others. Next is the micro level, which involves the trainers and those tasked with implementing the changes through dissemination and engagement with the policies and materials, including the teachers. This is not necessarily a linear, top-down process, as this research shows that there is scope for interpretation of the changes, in the ways that teachers respond positively or negatively, or with requests for further knowledge and support.

#### **6.10. Preschool children's perceptions of their learning experience in the Brunei government preschools**

There were two themes that emerged from the children's findings: 1) attitudes and 2) classroom space. The children's findings have helped in providing further interpretations of the classroom context. Some of the issues have already been discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the children's findings revealed that they are aware of 'being good' and that this helps their learning. Going back to the ethical issues presented in Chapter 4, this awareness may again indicate that the children are used to a strict regime and know that the sanctions may be quite harsh if they are 'not good'. Although Pra has been influenced by Western ideas about play and the project approach to learning, there are still deep-seated cultural attitudes to children's behaviour, and the place of the teacher in the children's world. Secondly, the fact that children did not have access to all areas of the classroom suggests that teachers are not yet able or willing to implement all aspects of the changes in Pra. The children's data illuminate that the teachers are still leaning towards the traditional teacher-centred approach in the classroom. This orientation also brings in the children's rights issue, as the children in this study were not given choices or freedom to make choices. Whereas the senior officers mentioned the teachers sometimes forget that the resources provided in the classroom are not solely for the teachers use; the resources were provided for the use and stimulation of the children. This rigidity also conflicts with and questions the ethics regarding the issue of children's rights; the teachers having their students' best interests in mind at all times. The findings revealed the teachers are doing more of what is 'easy' for them, rather than what is developmentally appropriate for the children in the class. The observational findings also revealed that children were doing the same activities and finishing at the same time as their peers. There are no differentiated activities that help nurture each child's individual learning development. This is another signal or indicator

that the culture and practice of teaching in Brunei is still favouring a traditional teacher-centred approach.

### **6.11. Senior officers' perspectives on teachers and children in terms of provision and policing the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools**

There are five themes emerging from the senior officers' findings: 1) reasons for change, 2) awareness of teachers' challenges, 3) challenges in implementing change, 4) support, and 5) characteristics of an ideal teacher.

#### *6.11.1. Reasons for change*

The reasons for change were all clearly based on the good intentions to raise the quality of preschool education in Brunei. Such a development would help to move the country towards achieving the objectives of SPN21. The supplementary document was observed to be supporting SPN21.

#### *6.11.2. Awareness of teachers' challenges*

The senior officers' awareness of the limited programmes available for the teachers to upgrade their status has resulted in both their units providing training to the teachers at the foundation level of teaching Pra. Both officers were aware that there are more untrained than trained teachers in Pra. Hence, the ECCE Unit created the Pra Committees from school zones, in order to help the teachers to have a support system in place, as an alternative if they do not want to have an open discussion directly with the senior officers. The development of the Pra Committee helped soften the power (and fear factor) invested in the senior officers, as the teachers were able to approach the mentors from their respective Pra Committee. These committees are comprised of teachers at their same level, who can offer help and advice in delivering the changes to their practice. The small number of members in each unit, in this case, five officers for the ECCE Unit and two ECE officers for the Curriculum Development and Department, may partly be the reason why the CPDs provided were brief and not in-depth.

#### *6.11.3. Challenges in implementing change*

The senior officers both highlighted that resources are no longer an issue to be considered as challenges in implementing change. They highlighted that teachers'

attitudes regarding the implementation of change are a concern and can act as roadblocks to the changes. They characterised the attitudes of the teachers who do not implement the change as in two parts: 1) for the trained teachers, they do not want to implement what they know and 2) the untrained teachers may well be facing challenges or finding it hard to implement the changes, as they are inexperienced with ECCE concepts. This can partly be due to the nature of training that the trained ECCE teachers receive in gaining their qualifications from the university. They have gone through the foundations of ECE, child development theories, intensive training on different teaching and learning methods that are appropriate for the children, and did teaching practice in schools as practice teachers and were mentored closely by their respective lecturers or supervisors, and via written assessments, during their 12-18 months course. Hence, ideally the trained teachers are supposed to be able to implement the changes easily. A further discussion with the senior officers revealed that the teachers may just be going for the qualification without passion; this view may be partly true as in the example of the trained teacher, Tina, who treated the child inappropriately, as cited in Chapter 5. Therefore, this problem goes back to the earlier discussion on Fullan (2007) relating to human beings as highly variable, each with their own repertoires.

#### *6.11.4. Support*

From the interview findings of the senior officers and my analysis, it seems that they were seeking uniformity in how the teachers delivered the policy. When the senior officers found out that teachers were interpreting the change policy in their own ways, or were not implementing the changes as desired, they were concerned. This concern is also evident from the policy makers' interviews regarding the changes, when they mentioned that they expected 'what they introduced to be reflected in the teaching practiced in the classrooms.' This view may be interpreted as the ministry looking for uniformity based on the policy documents, and the workshops that they have delivered. Hence, indirectly, there is the expectation for uniformity. There may have been a push to conformity that influenced the officers' perceptions when they observe the teachers in action, as the latter becomes a form of surveillance, and reveals whether the teachers are 'faithful' to the policy. Teachers might feel they are being examined or observed to show how well they are delivering the curriculum and whether they are conforming to the demands or messages of the training. In reality, it is the norm of teaching.

When policy translates down to the micro-level of implementation, it seems that the changes introduced to the teachers via CPD, provided by the ECCE unit, have fragmented any uniform delivery approach; the teachers have affected their own initiatives towards change. The reason was that when the senior officers came to their class, they only looked at the physical aspects of the classroom but they did not sit in to observe whether the teaching practice is up to the standard that they wanted; they only referred to the children's work output. This perspective is evident from the interview held with the senior officers. It seems that the senior officers are concerned with the structures that support change (curriculum materials, outcomes and monitoring), but not with the processes (pedagogy, planning, assessment). This orientation may be because of the former being far easier to check than the latter. Then the issue of monitoring the teachers is also problematic: there is a conflict as the senior officers mentioned they are not able to monitor the teaching practice because it is beyond their job scope. They mentioned that the school inspectorate, under the Department of Schools is supposed to monitor the teaching quality. This is, however, another example of fragmentation as training is provided by the ECCE Unit, and its members come to check on the classroom's physical aspects, as well as monitoring the physical space and the children's work.

#### *6.11.5. Characteristics of an ideal teacher*

Both the senior officers' responses to this item is that first a teacher must have a passion for teaching. Without this key ingredient, the teachers will not be able to change their practice. This is contradictory to the findings from the trained teacher, Tina, where she mentioned that being patient was one of the key characteristic. As reflected in the observation and incidental data from observations of Tina, this signals a gap in belief to practice. The rest of the teachers mentioned the characteristics of the ideal teacher as being active and eager to come for workshops, using them as an eye opener for problems that they are facing in the classroom practice. The ideal teacher also needs to: a) follow the changes for the children's improvement in learning; b) be creative; c) be knowledgeable and skilful in attracting children's attention in teaching and learning; d) display a willingness to work; e) have high spirit and be motivated; f) be a cheerful and smiley person; and g) be responsible towards children's education and safety.

The views regarding teachers' perceptions of ideal change also reflected that the teachers and senior officers knew the characteristics of an ideal teacher in implementing the changes. However, the teachers are in tension due to the conflict between their beliefs and practice, as mentioned earlier. The varied findings from this study between the untrained and trained teachers' ways of implementing their practice reflects Mundia (2012) who suggested to be highly qualified may not guarantee a teacher's effectiveness due to the knowledge of subject matter. This is in parallel with Goldhaber (2002) whereby good teaching is important but there are little differences where being highly qualified contributes to being a good teacher. Wood (2013) and Wood and Hedges (2016) emphasised the need for a good teacher to have an in-depth understanding of young children's learning and to be equipped with appropriate variations of teaching in order to be responsive both to the curriculum and children's interests.

The incidental data found from this study revealed similar findings from Asmah (2001), Asmah (2007), and Hanapi (2006). The incidental data is also alarming as it signalled a need for intervention from the Ministry of Education regarding ways of reporting such observations of teachers' inappropriate practice with children. More awareness is needed for all teachers in Brunei on the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the Bruneian version, Child and Young Persons Order (2006).

## **6.12. Reflexivity**

### *6.12.1. Limitations to the methodology*

The similarity of the questionnaire responses gathered in this research may have been the result of a perceived power relationship, as mentioned in Section 4.5, due to my positionality. Also, the presence of the ECCE Unit team from the Ministry may have influenced what the teachers were prepared to say and what they thought they were unable to say. Cultural issues, whereby in the Brunei context one is obliged to follow the leaders, may also have influence the teachers' responses.

I should point out that I was not able to stay for more than three months at a time per trip, to collect the data, due to the maximum number of days permitted to leave the place of learning, as I was under the Brunei Government Scholarship Scheme. I was based in Sheffield, UK, and needed to travel to my home country, Brunei, to collect the data. Hence, a pragmatic approach was considered desirable in order to help the

researcher and to reduce the limitation to allow for the application of flexibility when there are issues encountered during the research. These issues have been explained in Chapter 4. Three separate data gathering trips from Sheffield to Brunei were conducted, including the pilot study stage. The allowed time limitation for collecting data in Brunei further encouraged me to come up with a pragmatic research design that will allow for any flexibility of my research methods, according to the data collection needs relevant to my study. When a teacher was too busy to accommodate my data collection, such as via classroom observation and interviews, due to reasons such as meetings or school events, I resorted to the other available school(s) before coming back to the busy teacher; so no time was lost. When a child does not want to talk, I encouraged them to use drawing if they wanted to use that option as a medium to help communicate their thoughts. When using NVIVO software was unable keep up with the gathered, rich bilingual data, I found working with the paper and pen method for analysing the data worked well for me. My choice of medium is an example of how I have linked the pragmatic approach of my research design and research methods, to enable me to apply the interpretive model as my theoretical framework in analysing and completing the study. Integrating the pragmatic approach to my study enabled me to be flexible and not too rigid with my research methods, as the nature of my research approach is more towards the qualitative approach than the quantitative.

#### *6.12.2. Researcher positionality*

My positionality as explained in Section 4.5 earlier, has provided a lot of issues to be considered when it comes to collecting data, such as obtaining consent and issues of anonymity. However, if this study were to be carried out by a different person, it is unlikely a new researcher would find exactly the same patterns of answers, as the interpretation of the study context is unique to the interpreter's own understanding and experiences, as is the time during which the data was collected. Integrating pragmatism to my theoretical orientation of an interpretive approach, has enabled me to explore the relationship between the theories of change and the participants' beliefs that derived from the multiple data collected. The interpretive approach and position that I bring in further helped to analyse the data which is close and natural to its real-life context. This leads me to generate theory from the data and provided the understanding to the dynamics of the phenomenon of conceptualising change processes in Brunei preschools.

### **6.13. Summary of senior officers' perspectives on teachers and children in terms of provision and policing the progress of change in teaching and learning in Brunei government preschools**

Policy brings benefits but also brings problems and challenges. In Brunei, the benefits that the pre-school related policies brought include more attention being paid to the importance of investing in early childhood education. The initiative brings in ideas on improving teaching and learning for early childhood, as well as support in terms of increased funding and resources. On the other hand, policies and how these are implemented have highlighted how those initiatives are delivered inconsistently by the teachers. As a result, when I reflect on this study, the change processes in ECCE in Brunei look like a science experiment where water in a beaker is injected with coloured liquid; the change results in particles reacting and interacting differently, as in the preschools. The way that policy diffuses and is absorbed by the teachers means that the changes do not follow a similar or uniform pattern because of the way policy was delivered via the different levels: macro, meso and micro. This lack of consistency is also due to the teachers' own embedded set of beliefs about their teaching (Acker-Hocevar et al., 2011). Also affected is each teacher's professional identity that goes through a structuring and restructuring process in educational change, in turn creating professional and personal tensions and challenges (Lightfoot et al., 2015).

The main problem arising at the time the study was conducted, was that there was a vacancy for the post for an early childhood inspector within the inspectorate, and also a vacancy for a leading position at the ECCE Unit. So, because of the changes that have been ongoing, stable leadership effectively disappeared after implementation and teachers are just going back and forth, to and from their mentors. The mentors cannot come to the schools and observe their partner teacher's practice as they are both teachers at school working the same hours.

These changes in teaching and learning have involved a national impact on knowledge transfer utilising relevant expertise across the Ministry of Education, school zones and clusters. However, even though the changes occurred at macro, meso and micro levels, problems have emerged at each of these levels. Teachers may feel professionally

challenged, uncomfortable and anxious, when faced with new educational reforms. In this study, the teachers reported that they are sure of their own knowledge, and this view has been supported by their actions in trying to work out what works in their classroom with the required changes and in promoting the needs of the child. The cultural tensions and challenges revealed through the research data are very similar to the discourses of cultural tensions on change in international ECCE such Hong Kong (Li et al., 2015) with the similar cultural influences of obedience, discipline and hard work oriented towards high academic achievements. Parents' views on teaching as extracted from my questionnaire and teachers' interview findings revealed the expectations towards the 3Rs at an early stage. The children's interview findings revealed a significant use of the terms "being good" and being able to "focus" to do work, signals parents' expectations and emphasis on academic achievement. This orientation is further seen in Saiful's interview extract as presented in Section 5.25, where he was already aware of what is considered as "good behaviour" in performing well academically. For Azim, the awareness of parents' expectations to go to the best secondary school in the future was also revealed from his interview excerpts. These children's views can be seen as alarming, as this awareness of highly competitive attitudes towards academic achievement is being instilled in children as young as five years old. These findings from the children's data revealed parents may be in conflict with the Pra curriculum expectations which may be summarised as "implementing learning through play." The similarities in the findings of the Pra pedagogy of learning through play as very rigid and on the whole teacher-directed teaching, as found in this study, are similar to the findings of the research by Asmah (2007) and Hanapi (2006) into teachers' classroom practice in the Brunei context. These tensions are also similar to the Singapore narratives by Tan (2017) and Nyland et al. (2016) which state there are tensions with learning through play due to parents who are more academically oriented. However, their findings observed that Singapore managed to include educational versions of learning through play of structured adult-initiated activities, as opposed to the Western style of unstructured and child-initiated play. The tensions in the Brunei version, as illuminated from this study, showed some similarities in the way learning through play is adapted to the Brunei context; revealing very teacher directed and teacher controlled versions of educational play. The limited insights into parents' expectations that emerged from the teachers and children's data indirectly revealed their expectations for their children to become high academic achievers; such expectations may be interpreted

as realised and reflected in Brunei's high literacy rate. Though Hong Kong and Singapore are not similar to the Brunei context, they are similar to cultural tensions arising from conflicts between Western and non-Western beliefs and the inconsistencies of teachers' reported beliefs and classroom practices as noted in Qatar (Althani et al., 2013), Hong Kong (Li Wang and Wong, 2011; Pearson and Rao, 2006) and Singapore (Nyland and Ng, 2016), along with the lack of qualified teachers (Kirk, 2014).

Although there is tension detected from the findings of this study, it is important to highlight the implications of not communicating information effectively. There is no one right method for leading change in early childhood education, as that leadership will depend on factors such as: a) communication and interpersonal competence; b) culture of ongoing learning and development; c) critical thinking and reflection; d) collaboration and collective responsibility; e) consolidation of new learning and practice into daily routines; f) conflict resolution and consensus and g) creating a compelling vision that champions continuous quality improvement (Rodd, 2015, p.138).

The qualities or processes that were missing or insufficient in Brunei's attempt to successfully implement change processes in preschool educational reforms have been identified; informed by the work of Luecke (2003) and Fullan (2007) as cited earlier. In terms of educational reform processes, this research has indicated the changes are only at the physical level of classroom setting rearrangements; however, the prescribed changes have not altered the teachers' beliefs when translated into practice. This lack of movement confirms that changing teachers' beliefs does not happen quickly. Such a change needs further systematic monitoring and more progress to provide access to in-depth, hands-on training designed to support and motivate the teachers' understanding of the changes required. In addition, in the Bruneian context, the teachers need a stable educational leadership which can help facilitate the educational reform process to be implemented systematically. The findings from the Bruneian Pra setting, relating to the education change processes, showed that change is inevitably dynamic, rigorous and challenging.

## CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes this research initiative titled: “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study”. Chapter 7 starts by presenting the outcomes of the study, followed by the contribution of the thesis to the field of preschool education in Brunei. This chapter will also present implications of the study, implications for future research and lastly, a conclusion.

### 7.2. Brief outcomes of the study

This study has explored the research questions provided in Section 1.4. It mainly focused on the preschool education changes in the context of Brunei’s national curriculum reform. 123 Bruneian preschool teachers’ views were gathered via a survey; 4 teachers and 8 children were the subjects of interviews and observations, and 2 senior education officers were interviewed in order to investigate the enactment of the current preschool curriculum, and ongoing professional practices. Some major issues emerging from the investigation have been analysed and, as a result, suggestions for changes regarding the implementation of the preschool curriculum are offered. The main outcomes of the study are as follows:

- The implementation of SPN21 in the government preschools has met significant challenges, which are closely related to teachers’ professional practices and the resources available.
- The curriculum promotes a ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ approach. The changes in the curriculum have been further driven by an extended document on ‘The Transformation of Brunei Preschool Landscape’ to support the aims of SPN21.
- The changes introduced are mostly related to teaching pedagogy, which has greatly challenged teachers’ practice.
- The teachers mostly reported that they are embracing the changes introduced to the Pra teaching and learning. However, the data shared by the surveyed teachers may well have been different if the MOE officers from the ECCE Unit had not been present at the time of the questionnaire filling.
- There is evidence of real tensions and challenges in the process of change that are occurring in Brunei at the specific time of implementing the changes.

Emerging key themes are: a) some positives towards the changes, b) some cautious responses, and c) teachers being honest about the difficulties that they face.

- Continuous professional development with in-house training, workshops, and seminars from the Ministry of Education.
- Collaboration with other Pra teachers by having Pra committees from different zone areas, which act as a teacher support system. The committee members meet during training sessions, workshops, seminars to enable them to discuss and share ideas and find ways to solve any problems faced.

### **7.3. Contribution of the thesis**

This study makes a contribution to international literature by providing details of how Bruneian teachers are dealing with education reforms in Early Childhood Care and Education. This is the first research that has highlighted the way Brunei government preschool teachers, children and senior officers have responded to the implementation of educational change processes in a Brunei context. This thesis has identified a series of change processes, where there are layers of complexities, as well as mediating factors informing how change takes place. The original contribution of my thesis is the conceptualisation of educational change processes happening in Brunei's preschool education system, at a particular time, and in the context of Brunei Darussalam. This thesis also contributes information to the area of preschool education reforms, from a South East Asian perspective. Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to the ECCE discourses on what happens when an Islamic country in which the MIB concept is embedded, adopts learning cultures that are dissimilar to its own cultural values and traditions.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for educational reformers or policy makers to understand how the Brunei preschool teachers used their knowledge of the intended educational reforms expressed in a government policy and enacted them in practice. Also included are the perspectives and voices of some of the Pra children themselves, as well as policy makers; information which was gathered as the dynamic stage of the education reforms initiatives was being conducted.

In addition, the findings in this study have answered the call from His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei by looking into the education reforms of SPN21 at the Pra curriculum level. Othman (2014) reported an extract taken from His Majesty's 'Titah' during the 24<sup>th</sup> Teachers Day Celebration (extracted from the Borneo Bulletin dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014), which mentioned that His Majesty welcomes the effort made by the Ministry of Education to evaluate any weaknesses in SPN21. The Sultan also advised the Ministry of Education not only to show the positive aspects of SPN21 but also to highlight the weaknesses that SPN21 encountered during its early stages, as well as the need to explain what had been done to solve these issues.

#### **7.4. Implications of the study**

The findings of the study present seven implications: 1) the need to revise Brunei's Pra curriculum, 2) the need for full-time teachers' assistants and SENA teachers, 3) awareness of the protection of the child and children's rights issues, 4) lack of a reward system to motivate those teachers who are actually implementing in-depth changes, 5) providing teachers with opportunities to upgrade, 6) sustaining future education reforms, and 7) training.

##### *7.4.1. The need to have a 'Brunei branded' curriculum*

The findings in this study suggest the need to have a 'Brunei branded' curriculum to be tailored to include the characteristics of the uniquely Bruneian social and cultural contexts. Poland's education system, as described by Handke (2015), can be used as a reference point by learning how the Polish policy makers were able to incorporate their cultural values and beliefs into their education policy. However, Brunei should avoid replication of the Polish initiative, as the contexts of the two countries are very different. This qualifying observation is because Western ideologies may not be suitable for the Bruneian classroom culture and context, due to different child-rearing practices and social norms. The implication for policy is a need to review the Pra curriculum to make the main concepts more detailed and clearer for the teachers who are required to implement them. This clarification may help teachers, or anyone interested, to avoid adopting open or misguided interpretations with regards to understanding the curriculum. The Pra curriculum has shown a lot of Western influences, a point addressed in Section 2.9, above.

The supplementary document on the transformational landscape has been enacted throughout the country, along with SPN21. Therefore, the document itself now needs to be revised to include and reflect upon the changes, for the supplementary document to be incorporated into the Brunei Pra curriculum. The revision of the Brunei Pra curriculum can then be used as guidelines for achieving developmental learning outcomes that can be shared with the preschool teachers and especially the young students' parents. In this way, by having clear guidance on developmental learning outcomes, as well as the document being openly shared with the parents, those parents can have a better understanding of what their child is learning. It is arguable that this understanding will indirectly help the parents to be more involved and aware of any new directions in preschool education. Hopefully this outcome will encourage them to provide support towards their child's learning activities. An example of this concept can be seen in Singapore's 'Nurturing Early Learners: A Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore' (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2013). Again, I iterate using the Singapore framework mainly for reference, rather than replication, when revising the Brunei's Pra curriculum.

#### *7.4.2. The need for full time teacher assistants and SENA teachers*

The findings of this study also identify the tensions of teachers having to deal with big numbers of children in the class whilst, in some cases, also attending to children with special needs. These tension-producing situations signal the need to have full time teachers' assistants in Pra classes. It also signals the urgent need to accelerate recruitment of teachers with special needs' expertise in order for the Brunei government to deliver an appropriate inclusive education approach in preschool and other classrooms.

#### *7.4.3. Awareness on the protection of the child and children's rights and responsibilities issue*

As the study has also recorded 'incidental' data of observed inappropriate treatment of children in the classroom, there is a need to emphasise s. 9 of the *Child and Young Persons Order, 2006 CAP. 219* (Brunei) and the United Nations Children's Rights Conventions of 1989. This focus may help regulate the teachers' awareness not only in Pra but generally to all Brunei teachers, regardless of the level of teaching. Such a focus

is also a means of ensuring that the children are not mistreated and that teachers should always try to act in the best interests of their students.

#### *7.4.4. Reward system*

A reward system might be helpful to further motivate the teachers. That puts responsibility back to the meso level and the macro level. The senior officers who are helping to do the training should be able to identify teachers who have implemented the changes well. Those teachers can then be used as models for other teachers, and as a point of evidence reference. The teachers can also be rewarded with acknowledgement of achievements on small milestones.

#### *7.4.5. Providing teachers with opportunities to upgrade*

The findings of the data indicate that teaching in pre-school classrooms is still predominantly teacher led, suggesting that it is time for teachers to be trained and provided opportunities to upgrade their professional backgrounds. Table 2.4, illustrated 85% (n= 358) from a total of 425 preschool teachers in Brunei government and private schools in 2010, are mainly teachers who are non-specialised in early childhood education programmes. 38% (n=164) were holders of diplomas and certificates in education. In addition, the recent data found in this current study, collected via questionnaires and presented in Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4, showed 60% (n= 74) of the 123 teachers in this study, out of the 256 government preschool teachers in Brunei, possess diplomas and certificates in education, which are non-specialised early childhood qualifications. Providing the teachers with opportunities to be trained in specialised early childhood education programmes may help with the changes required in the preschool education system. It is hoped that when the teachers are trained in those early childhood education programmes, they will have a better understanding of the concepts of the Brunei preschool curriculum. Such a curriculum enshrines a child initiated approach, through the delivery of a ‘Fun, Play and Learn More’ model, as required by SPN21. For change to be effective, there needs to be a transformation to training ECCE teachers at graduate level.

#### *7.4.6. Training*

The findings of this study revealed the different adapted ways of how the teachers implemented the perceived project approach. More support is needed to provide in-

depth CPD courses as a collaboration of CPD provided by the Early Childhood Education team, with the teacher training providers located in SHBIE, UBD. The latter institution offers a means of providing in-depth training and providing accreditations to the CPD modules, which can be accounted towards professional qualification, as components of a lifelong learning programme.

#### *7.4. Sustaining future education reforms*

Clear communication is part of maintaining future education reforms. To ensure future education reforms are sustained, teachers and other relevant stakeholders including academics staffing teacher training providers such as SHBIE, UBD, need to be made aware of the change initiatives by providing them with information that is freely accessible and transparent. This may help to get the teachers ‘on board’ with the changes and also to ensure the training provided by the teacher training providers in Brunei is at the same level as the objectives of the Ministry of Education’s initiated educational changes.

Findings from this study illuminated areas of concern in teachers’ performance monitoring, a problem which relates to leadership. Leadership needs to be present throughout the initiated education reforms in future, in order to follow through and sustain those reforms. Having stable leadership also provides support in monitoring and implementing the changes. This study has revealed that the loss of stable leadership towards the end of the implementation of initiated changes has negatively impacted the already dwindling effect of the changes, and has therefore put the changes into a currently static position.

#### **7.5. Implications for further research**

This study has provided an understanding of how the educational change drivers in the Brunei government preschool system have impacted the teachers, children and the senior officers in implementing the educational changes. With the insights provided in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study, future research topics in the preschool field could include:

1. “How do the Brunei government preschool parents perceive their children’s learning experience in Pra classes?”

This is suggested as the current study does not take parents' perspectives into account, due to the time constraints in collecting data. Accessing parents' perspectives may provide a whole overview of all the stakeholders' perceptions during the educational change processes.

2. "What are the expectations of the Bruneian parents towards their children's learning in Pra?"

This issue is brought up because this current study only indirectly revealed parents' expectations of their children's learning, as implied from information in the teachers' questionnaire, as well as from the teachers' and children's interview findings.

3. "What are the Pra teachers' perspectives on the Pra committee as a support group?"

With the set up of the Pra committees, research investigating the effectiveness of the support groups for the Pra teachers will provide further insights into how the preschool teachers deal with teaching challenges or tensions when they arise.

## **7.6. Conclusion**

To conclude, this study has contributed to international literature on how ECCE is being impacted by the global economy. Brunei is still in the process of implementing change, although today it seems, from my observations, that progress has been stunted for a range of reasons. However, there are still ongoing projects that are being introduced to further improve Brunei's education system. The Brunei education policy has good intentions of trying to bring in different ideas, but the journey from policy to practice is not a linear process. My study showed there are lots of dislocations between how policy is conceptualised and how policy is enacted in ECCE settings; in particular there are specific things that need to happen at the macro, meso and micro levels. There are certain change processes that need to happen for the policy-practice interface to be more coherent. This study on educational change at the preschool level suggests that the process may benefit from the assistance of local leaders who are insightful, thereby helping changes to occur (Patterson, McAuley and Fleet, 2013). To further explore and deepen our understanding of the concept of educational changes in the Brunei preschool education system, this study has aimed to portray the change initiative using teachers',

children's and senior government officers' multiple perspectives. Research aimed at understanding the layers of the complexity of the change processes in the Brunei preschool education system has contributed to the literature of educational reforms informed by a multi-layered and multi-level narrative of change. No curriculum reform can succeed without teachers' input and their active, constructive participation. The issue is not simply about changing the curriculum or transforming the education landscape at preschools in Brunei; the issue also involves teachers' modes of thinking, communicative approaches and their professional identities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consent letter to conduct research from the University of Sheffield



**The  
School  
Of  
Education.**

Nordiana ZAKIR  
PhD

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education  
888 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

19<sup>th</sup> November 2013

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 8180  
**Email:** MPhil-PhD@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Nordiana

#### **ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

*"The Impact of Change Processes in Early Childhood Education: A Case Study of Brunei Government Preschools"*

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Professor Dan Goodley.

Professor Dan Goodley  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

CC Professor Elizabeth Wood  
Davy Heymann (RIS)

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

### *Kaji Selidik bagi Guru-Guru Prasekolah*

Tajuk Kajian:	<b>Kesan-kesan Proses Perubahan dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Peringkat Awal Kanak-Kanak: Kajian keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam</b>	
Penyelidik:	<b>Nordiana Zakir</b>	Emel: <b><u><a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a></u></b>
Penyelia:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood</b> Emel: <b><u><a href="mailto:E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk">E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk</a></u></b> <b>School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom</b>	

Assalamualaikum dan Selamat Petang kepada Cikgu-cikgu Pra yang dihormati sekalian,

Saya Nordiana Zakir, sedang membuat kajian diperingkat kedoktoran mengenai "Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Peringkat Awal Kanak-Kanak: Kajian Keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam" di University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Kaji selidik ini bertujuan untuk membantu saya:

1. Memahami proses perubahan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang sedang berlaku di Prasekolah
2. Untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana anda menggunakan kapasiti anda sebagai guru pra dan pengetahuan pedagogi dalam merancang pengajaran dan pembelajaran, pengurusan suasana pembelajaran dan pelaksanaan kurikulum Prasekolah.
3. Untuk mengetahui perspektif dan pengalaman anda dalam menangani perubahan-perubahan dalam sistem pengajaran dan pembelajaran Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Kerjasama anda dalam menjawab kaji selidik ini adalah sangat dihargai. Segala maklumat yang diberi adalah sulit dan maklumat yang diperolehi akan dapat membantu menaikkan taraf sistem pendidikan Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam. Hasil cadangan dari kajian ini akan diserahkan kepada Kementerian Pendidikan, Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Bagi makluman cikgu, menurut undang-undang etika kajian (*research ethics*) University of Sheffield, United Kingdom, segala maklumat yang anda berikan adalah dikategorikan sebagai sulit. Segala analisis yang dibuat adalah untuk menyediakan maklumat secara keseluruhan dan bukan hasil respon secara individu. Oleh itu, tidak ada seorang pun yang diberikan kebenaran untuk melihat hasil data yang asal (*raw data*) kecuali saya (Nordiana- penyelidik), dan penyelia saya (Professor Dr Elizabeth) untuk menjaga hak sulit bagi tujuan kajian ini. Sistem koding akan digunakan bagi memastikan nama dan sekolah cikgu tidak akan dapat dikesan dalam analisis kajian. Jika cikgu ada sebarang pertanyaan mengenai kajian ini, cikgu boleh menghubungi saya atau penyelia saya melalui emel yang telah diberikan.

Saya juga tidak lupa mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih diatas kerjasama yang cikgu berikan bagi membantu saya melaksanakan kajian ini. Sekian terima kasih.

## Questionnaire for Preschool Teachers

Research Title: **The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study**

Researcher: **Nordiana Zakir**

Email: [Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk)

Supervisor: **Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood** Email: [E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk)  
**School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom**

Dear Teachers,

My name is Nordiana Zakir and currently doing my doctoral research on “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study” at The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

This survey is designed to assist me in (i) understanding change processes in the Brunei government preschool education, and (ii) to identify how you use your capacity as preschool teacher and pedagogical knowledge in planning lessons, organising the learning environment and implementing the curriculum in your settings, and (iii) to understand your perspectives and experiences of change processes in the Brunei government preschool education system.

Your responses in this survey are highly appreciated. Information that you provide will assist me in analysing the needs towards improving the quality of preschool education in Brunei. Recommendations from the study will be provided to the Ministry of Education in Brunei. Under the ethics regulation of University of Sheffield, all information you share will be confidential and any analysis of responses will be designed to produce general results based on data from all questionnaires returned, not individual responses. No one outside the project will be allowed access to the original data. All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports. Your name will not appear in the documentation and there will be a coding system for recorded information. As with other teachers you will be assured of proper treatment, without any form of pressure which could worry you. Participation is voluntary. If for any reason you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time. If you have any concerns regarding this study you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in the email address provided. Thank you for your cooperation in this important research.

Warm regards,

***Nordiana Zakir***

Postgraduate Research Student

PhD in Education

University of Sheffield

Confidential/ Sulit

Questionnaire for Preschool Teachers/ Kaji selidik Untuk Guru-Guru Prasekolah

1. Name/ Nama: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Email/ Emel: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age/Umur: \_\_\_\_\_ years/tahun
5. Sex/Jantina:  Male/ Lelaki  Female/ Perempuan
6. Please tick (✓) your highest academic qualification  
Sila tandakan (✓) bagi kelulusan akademik tertinggi:

+			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Master in Early Childhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diploma in Primary Education
<input type="checkbox"/>	MTeach in Early Childhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	Certificate in Early Childhood
<input type="checkbox"/>	B.Ed in Early Childhood Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	A-Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	BA in Primary Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Others (please specify): Lain-lain (sila nyatakan): _____

7. Name of current school/: \_\_\_\_\_  
Nama sekolah tempat bertugas
8. No. of years teaching at preschool level: \_\_\_\_\_ years/ tahun  
Jumlah tahun mengajar diperingkat Prasekolah
9. Total teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_ years/ tahun  
Jumlah tahun mengajar secara keseluruhan
10. How many students do you have in your current Pra class? \_\_\_\_\_ students/ murid  
Berapa ramai murid Pra didalam kelas anda pada masa ini?

11. Please tick (✓) the answers that best suit you:

*Sila tandakan (✓) bagi jawapan yang sesuai dengan anda:*

No.	Statement/ <i>Penyataan</i>	Strongly agree/ <i>Amat bersetuju</i>	Agree/ <i>bersetuju</i>	Disagree/ <i>Tidak bersetuju</i>	Strongly disagree/ <i>Amat tidak bersetuju</i>
1	I am confident in teaching Pra <i>Saya konfiden/yakin mengajar Pra</i>				
2	I understand the Pra Syllabus <i>Saya faham syllabus Pra</i>				
3	I understand the requirements of SPN21 for Pra <i>Saya faham keperluan SPN21 untuk Pra</i>				
4	I am aware of my role as a Pra teacher <i>Saya tahu peranan saya sebagai guru Pra</i>				
5	I am able to work collaboratively with other Pra teachers <i>Saya tahu bekerja secara kolaboratif dengan guru Pra lain</i>				
6	I know my own strengths and areas requiring growth (able to do self-reflection) in my teaching and learning for Pra <i>Saya tahu kekuatan saya dan perkara yang memerlukan perkembangan di dalam melaksanakan pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra (dapat menggunakan refleksi diri)</i>				
7	I am seeking out information from other sources about the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra to understand it better <i>Saya cuba mencari maklumat dari sumber lain bagi lebih memahami mengenai perubahan yang dilaksanakan di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra</i>				
8	I am prepared to apply and adapt the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra <i>Saya sedia mengaplikasikan dan menyesuaikan perubahan yang dilaksanakan di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra</i>				
9	I am making deliberate efforts to coordinate with other Pra teachers using the changes introduced in teaching and learning for Pra <i>Saya berusaha untuk bekerjasama dengan guru Pra lain bagi menjalankan perubahan di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra</i>				

No.	Statement/ <i>Penyataan</i>	Strongly agree/ <i>Amat bersetuju</i>	Agree/ <i>bersetuju</i>	Disagree/ <i>Tidak bersetuju</i>	Strongly disagree/ <i>Amat tidak bersetuju</i>
10	I know how to set up learning corners in my Pra class <i>Saya tahu cara menyediakan sudut belajar (learning corners) di dalam kelas Pra saya</i>				
11	I know how to apply the project approach in my teaching and learning <i>Saya tahu mengaplikasikan pendekatan kaedah projek dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran saya</i>				
12	I know how to use the mind map for my lesson plan <i>Saya tahu menggunakan peta minda dalam menyediakan persediaan mengajar</i>				
13	I know how to involve parents in Pra activities <i>Saya tahu cara melibatkan ibubapa dalam aktiviti Pra</i>				
14	I know how to plan and prepare for end of term showcase for Pra <i>Saya tahu bagaimana hendak menyediakan dan mengadakan persembahan (showcase) hasil kerja murid diujung penggal persekolahan Pra</i>				
15	I know how to apply learning through play in my Pra activities <i>Saya tahu mengaplikasi kaedah bermain sambil belajar dalam aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran saya</i>				
16	I know how to get materials for teaching and learning Pra <i>Saya tahu cara mendapatkan bahan-bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran bagi kelas Pra saya</i>				
17	Teachers are agents of change in children's learning <i>Guru adalah agen perubahan di dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak</i>				

12. Are you experiencing any changes in teaching Pra (e.g. changes in teaching style, preparing lessons, etc)?  
*Adakah anda mengalami perubahan dalam mengajar Pra (perubahan dari segi cara pengajaran, penyediaan pembelajaran, dan sebagainya)?*

Yes/ Ya       No/ Tidak

13. What are the 3 main changes in teaching Pra in your classroom?

*Sila nyatakan 3 perubahan utama dalam mengajar Pra didalam darjah anda.*

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_  
c. \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you think that changes in teaching and learning Pra are necessary?

*Bagi pendapat anda, adakah perubahan cara pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra itu perlu?*

Yes/ Ya       No/ Tidak

*Please explain your reason(s)/ Sila nyatakan sebab bagi jawapan anda.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. How are you managing the main areas of change in your classroom?

*Bagaimana cara anda menangani perubahan yang utama dalam darjah anda?*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you have support in managing the change in teaching and learning Pra?

*Adakah anda mendapat bantuan dalam menangani perubahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra?*

Yes/ Ya       No/ Tidak

17. What kind of support is provided in managing the change in teaching and learning Pra?

*Apakah jenis bantuan yang diberikan bagi anda menangani perubahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra?*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. Please tick (✓) the trainings that you have attended below:  
*Sila tandakan (✓) pada latihan yang telah anda sertai di bawah ini:*

	Phonics for Pra / <i>Kaedah fonetik</i>
	Introduction to Pra Teaching/ <i>Pengenalan mengajar Prasekolah</i>
	Learning through play/ <i>Belajar sambil bermain</i>
	Project approach/ <i>Kaedah projek</i>
	Mind map/ <i>Peta minda</i>
	Involving parents in Pra activities/ <i>Melibatkan ibu bapa dalam aktiviti Pra</i>
	Managing school visit for Pra children/ <i>Cara mengendalikan lawatan bagi kanak-kanak Pra</i>
	Management for Pra Children/ <i>Cara mengendalikan kanak-kanak Pra</i>
	Others/ <i>Lain-lain:</i> _____

19. Would you like to help me to understand your experience in going through the changes (transformation) in teaching Pra? (If 'Yes' please proceed to Q.21, if 'No' please proceed to Q.22)  
*Adakah anda mahu berkongsi bersama saya mengenai pengalaman anda melalui perubahan (transformasi) mengajar Pra?*

Yes/ *Ya (Sila jawab soalan 21 dan 22)*

No/ *Tidak (Sila jawab soalan 22)*

20. How would you like to get involved in this research? ( Please tick (✓) ONE answer only).  
*Bagaimana anda ingin melibatkan diri dengan kajian ini?(Sila tandakan (✓) bagi SATU pilihan sahaja).*

	Group discussion with Pra teachers/ <i>Perbincangan secara berkumpulan dengan guru-guru Pra</i>
	Individual interview (face to face)/ <i>Interview secara individu (bersua muka)</i>
	Individual interview by phone/ <i>Interview melalui telefon</i>
	By answering a set of questions in an email/ <i>Menjawab set soalan melalui emel</i>

21. Comments and suggestions for changes (transformation) for teaching and learning for Pra  
*Komen dan cadangan mengenai perubahan (transformasi) pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra:*

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**Thank you for your participation.**  
*Terima kasih diatas kesudian anda menjawab kajiselidik ini.*

### Appendix 3: Information sheet and consent form for teachers' observation and interview

#### Maklumat Kajian Bagi Guru-Guru Prasekolah

Tajuk Kajian:	<b>Kesan-kesan Proses Perubahan dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Peringkat Awal Kanak-Kanak: Kajian keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam</b>	
Penyelidik:	<b>Nordiana Zakir</b>	Emel: <a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a>
Penyelia:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood</b> School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom	

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

dan

Salam sejahtera kepada Guru Pra yang dihormati.

Saya, Nordiana Haji Zakir, sedang membuat kajian mengenai "Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan Dalam Pembelajaran Awal Kanak-Kanak, Kajian Keatas Prasekolah Brunei".

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membantu saya dalam memahami:

1. Memahami proses perubahan yang sedang berlaku di Prasekolah Brunei
2. Untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana anda menggunakan kapasiti anda sebagai seorang guru pra dan pengetahuan pedagogi dalam merancang pembelajaran, pengurusan suasana pembelajaran dan pelaksanaan kurikulum pra sekolah
3. Untuk mengetahui perspektif dan pengalaman anda dalam menangani perubahan perubahan dalam sistem pembelajaran pra sekolah brunei

Kerjasama cikgu dalam melibatkan diri dengan cara membenarkan saya mencerap sesi pembelajaran dan pembelajaran di bilik darjah Pra dan juga dengan membenarkan saya menemu ramah cikgu bagi perbincangan setelah pencerapan dijalankan adalah sangat-sangat dihargai.

Saya memilih enam buah sekolah secara rambang dan sekolah cikgu adalah salah satu daripadanya. Cikgu dan guru-guru Pra yang terlibat dalam kajian ini akan dilibatkan mulai Mac hingga Mei 2014. Segala maklumat yang diberi adalah sulit dan maklumat-maklumat yang diperolehi akan dapat membantu menaikkan taraf pra sekolah di Brunei Darussalam. Jika cikgu ada sebarang pertanyaan mengenai kajian, cikgu boleh menghubungi saya melalui emel yang telah diberikan.

Jika sekiranya Cikgu bersetuju untuk melibatkan diri dalam kajian ini, sila baca dan beri tandatangan anda bagi borang kebenaran yang dilampirkan. Saya juga tidak lupa mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih di atas kerjasama yang anda berikan bagi membantu saya melaksanakan kajian ini. Sekian terima kasih.

Yang benar,

**Nordiana Haji Zakir**  
PhD in Education  
University of Sheffield

## Information Sheet for the Teachers

Research Title:	<b>The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study</b>	
Researcher:	<b>Nordiana Zakir</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a>
Supervisor:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood</b> Email: <a href="mailto:E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk">E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk</a> <b>School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom</b>	

Dear Teachers,

My name is Nordiana Zakir and currently doing my doctoral research on “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study” at The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

This research is designed to assist me in:

1. understanding change processes in the Brunei government preschool education, and
2. to identify how you use your capacity as preschool teacher and pedagogical knowledge in planning lessons, organising the learning environment and implementing the curriculum in your settings, and
3. to understand your perspectives and experiences of change processes in the Brunei government preschool education system.

I chose six schools randomly for this study, and your school is one of them. Your participation in this research is highly appreciated. Information that you provide will assist me in analysing the needs towards improving the quality of preschool education in Brunei. Recommendations from the study will be provided to the Ministry of Education in Brunei. Under the ethics regulation of University of Sheffield, all information you share will be confidential and any analysis of responses will be designed to produce general results based on data from all the teachers involved, not individual responses. No one outside the project will be allowed access to the original data. All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports. Your name will not appear in the documentation and there will be a coding system for recorded information. As with other teachers you will be assured of proper treatment, without any form of pressure which could worry you. Participation is voluntary. If for any reason you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time. If you have any concerns regarding this study you are welcome to contact me in the email address provided. Thank you for your cooperation in this important research.

Warm regards,

**Nordiana Zakir**

Postgraduate Research Student

PhD in Education

University of Sheffield

**Borang kebenaran melibatkan anak anda dalam kajian “Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan Dalam Pembelajaran Awal Kanak-Kanak, Kajian Keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam”.**

***Consent form to be included in the research on “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study.***

Sila tandakan  jika anda bersetuju dan tandakan  jika anda tidak bersetuju pada kotak di bawah ini:

*Please indicate with  if you agree or  if you disagree in the box to each of the statements below:*

1. Saya mengesahkan bahawa saya telah memahami isi kandungan lembaran maklumat mengenai kajian ini dan berpeluang untuk bertanyakan soalan.   
*I understand the contents of the research information and have the opportunity to ask questions.*
  
2. Saya faham penglibatan saya adalah secara sukarela dan saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa memberikan sebarang alasan.   
*I understand my involvement in the research is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw at any time of the research without the need to inform reasons.*
  
3. Saya faham segala maklumat yang saya berikan, boleh diterbitkan, walau bagaimanapun identiti cikgu tidak akan dikenalpasti dan sebarang maklumat peribadi tidak akan digunakan dalam kajian ini.   
*I understand all the information that is collected from me is kept confidential and anonymous. I understand the information will be published with my identity not being able to be identified as pseudonyms will be used.*
  
4. Saya setuju untuk melibatkan diri dalam kajian ini.   
*I agree to be involved as participant in this research.*

**Nama guru/ Teacher’s Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tandatangan/ Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tarikh/ Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: Information sheet and consent from parents for their child to participate

### Maklumat Kajian Bagi Ibubapa/ Penjaga Murid

Tajuk Kajian:	<b>Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Peringkat Awal Kanak-Kanak: Kajian keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam</b>	
Penyelidik:	<b>Nordiana Haji Zakir</b>	Emel: <a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a>
Penyelia:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom</b>	

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dan

Salam sejahtera kepada ibubapa/penjaga murid yang dihormati.

Saya Nordiana Haji Zakir, sedang membuat kajian diperingkat kedoktoran mengenai “Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Peringkat Awal Kanak-Kanak: Kajian Keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam” di University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Saya telah mendapat kebenaran untuk menjalankan kajian ini daripada pihak University of Sheffield, United Kingdom bertarikh 19 November 2013 dan juga kebenaran daripada Kementerian Pendidikan Negara Brunei Darussalam bertarikh 13 Mac 2014. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memahami proses perubahan dari segi pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang berlaku diperingkat prasekolah untuk membantu menaikkan kualiti pengajaran dan pembelajaran Pra. Ianya juga untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana guru menggunakan kapasiti mereka sebagai guru Pra dan pengetahuan pedagogi dalam merancang pembelajaran, pengurusan suasana pembelajaran dan pelaksanaan kurikulum Prasekolah. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui perspektif dan pengalaman anak anda di dalam pembelajaran Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Bagi maklumat ibubapa/penjaga murid, saya memilih enam buah prasekolah secara rambang dan sekolah anak Tuan/Puan adalah salah satu daripadanya. Murid-murid dari setiap prasekolah yang terpilih akan dilibatkan dalam kajian ini mulai April hingga Mei 2014. Dengan ini, saya meminta kebenaran dari pihak ibubapa/penjaga murid untuk memberi kebenaran untuk melibatkan anak Tuan/Puan dalam kajian ini. Dengan izin Tuan/Puan, saya akan membuat pencerapan pengalaman pembelajaran anak anda di dalam kelas. Saya juga akan berbincang dengan anak anda mengenai pengalaman mereka belajar di dalam kelas dan jika perlu, anak anda akan melukis mengenai pengalamannya belajar di kelas Pra.

Saya juga akan mengambil gambar semasa anak anda melakukan aktiviti pembelajaran dan gambar-gambar tersebut hanya akan digunakan bagi tujuan analisis dan laporan kajian ini melalui penghasilan sebuah tesis. Sebarang penggunaan gambar untuk tujuan lain tidak akan dibuat tanpa kebenaran dari pihak Tuan/Puan terlebih dahulu. Segala maklumat yang diberikan oleh anak anda adalah sulit dan maklumat-maklumat yang diperolehi akan dapat membantu menaikkan taraf prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam. Jika Tuan/Puan ada sebarang pertanyaan mengenai kajian, anda boleh menghubungi saya melalui emel yang telah diberikan atau menghubungi guru kelas Pra bagi penjelasan selanjutnya.

Jika sekiranya Tuan/Puan memberi kebenaran untuk melibatkan anak anda dalam kajian ini, sila baca dan beri tandatangan anda bagi borang kebenaran yang dilampirkan. Saya juga tidak lupa mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih di atas kerjasama yang anda berikan bagi membantu saya melaksanakan kajian ini. Sekian terima kasih.

### **Information Sheet for Parents/ Guardian (Translation)**

Dear Parents/ Guardian,

My name is Nordiana Zakir and currently doing my doctoral research on “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study” at The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

This research is designed to assist me in:

4. understanding change processes in the Brunei government preschool education, and
5. to identify how you use your capacity as preschool teacher and pedagogical knowledge in planning lessons, organising the learning environment and implementing the curriculum in your settings, and
6. to understand your perspectives and experiences of change processes in the Brunei government preschool education system.

I chose six schools randomly for this study, and your child’s school is one of them. Your child’s participation in this research is highly appreciated. Information that your child provide will assist me in analysing the needs towards improving the quality of preschool education in Brunei. Recommendations from the study will be provided to the Ministry of Education in Brunei. Under the ethics regulation of University of Sheffield, all information gathered from your child is confidential and any analysis of responses will be designed to produce general results based on data from all the participants involved, not individual responses. No one outside the project will be allowed access to the original data. All the information that is collected from your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your child responses will not be able to be identified in any reports. Your child’s name will not appear in the documentation and there will be a coding system for recorded information. As with other participants your child will be assured of proper treatment, without any form of pressure which could worry you or your child. Participation is voluntary. If for any reason you wish to withdraw your child from the study, you are free to do so at any time. If you have any concerns regarding this study you are welcome to contact me in the email address provided. Thank you for your cooperation in this important research.

Yang benar/ Warm regards,

***Nordiana Zakir***

Postgraduate Research Student

PhD in Education

University of Sheffield

**Borang kebenaran melibatkan anak anda dalam kajian “Kesan-Kesan Proses Perubahan Dalam Pembelajaran Awal Kanak-Kanak, Kajian Keatas Prasekolah di Negara Brunei Darussalam”.**  
***Parents’ consent form to allow child to be included in the research on “The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study”.***

Sila tandakan  jika anda bersetuju dan tandakan  jika anda tidak bersetuju pada kotak di bawah ini:

Please indicate with  if you agree or  if you disagree in the box to teach of the statements below:

1. Saya mengesahkan bahawa saya telah memahami isi kandungan lembaran maklumat mengenai kajian ini.   
*I confirm that I have read and understand the contents of the research information and have the opportunity to ask questions.*
2. Saya faham penglibatan anak saya adalah secara sukarela dan saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa memberikan sebarang alasan.   
*I understand my child's involvement in this research is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw at any time of the research without the need to inform reasons.*
3. Saya faham segala maklumat yang saya berikan, boleh diterbitkan,walaupun bagaimanapun identiti anak anda tidak akan dikenalpasti dan sebarang maklumat peribadi tidak akan digunakan dalam kajian ini.   
*I understand all the information that is collected from me is kept confidential and anonymous. I understand the information will be published with my identity not being able to be identified as pseudonyms will be used.*
4. Saya setuju untuk melibatkan anak saya dalam kajian ini.   
*I agree to allow my child to be involved in this research.*
5. Saya berikan kebenaran untuk mengambil gambar anak saya sewaktu aktiviti pembelajaran dijalankan untuk kegunaan analisa kajian.   
*I consent for pictures to be taken of my child during the learning activity for this research purpose.*
6. Saya memberi kebenaran untuk menggunakan gambar anak saya yang diambil sewaktu aktiviti pembelajaran untuk dimasukkan bagi kegunaan penulisan laporan kajian dan penerbitan kajian ini sebagai tesis (laporan bertulis).   
*I consent for publication of my child's picture taken during the learning activity in this reesearch for appropriate use for the written report of this research.*

**Nama ibubapa/penjaga (Name of parent/guardian):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nama anak (Name of child):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tandatangan (Signature):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tarikh (Date):** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Information sheet and consent sheet for child

### Information Sheet for Children Involved in the Research (Translation)

Research Title:	<b>The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study</b>	
Researcher:	<b>Nordiana Zakir</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a>
Supervisor:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk">E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk</a> School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

My name is **Diana** and I am doing a project for my course.

I would really like to hear about how you would describe your preschool activities and learning experiences.



Our talk would be private. I will not tell your teachers or your family what you say.

You can ask for the conversation (interview) to stop at any time. It will take no longer than one hour.



You can draw your preschool experiences to add to the conversation if you want to.



Your pictures will be taken while doing your preschool activities.



You can say yes or no. It is up to you whether you take part.



If you do want to take part, please ask someone to help you read the form.



If you would like to talk to me, I would be very grateful if you could sign the attached form and return it to school.



If you would like to know more about the project, please contact me at the above address.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for your help.



Yours sincerely

**Diana**

*Sample adapted from: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/researchethics/1-4-samples.html>*

## Participant Consent Form (Child)

Research Title:	<b>The Impact of Educational Change Processes in Brunei Preschools: An Interpretive Study</b>	
Researcher:	<b>Nordiana Zakir</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk">Nordiana.zakir@sheffield.ac.uk</a>
Supervisor:	<b>Professor Dr Elizabeth Wood</b> Email: <a href="mailto:E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk">E.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk</a> <b>School of Education, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom</b>	

Participant Identification Number for this project:

**Please circle the face**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1. I agree to tell my preschool learning experiences for the above project. |    |    |
| 2. I agree that the conversation (interview) can be recorded.               |    |    |
| 3. I agree to draw about my learning experiences.                           |   |   |
| 4. I agree to allow my pictures to be taken for the purpose of the project. |  |  |
| 5. I understand that I can stop taking part at any time of the project.     |  |  |
| 6. I agree to take part in the above research project.                      |  |  |

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
For the researcher only:

I certify that I have explained the study to the child and consider that the child understand what is involved.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Copies: \_\_\_\_\_

*Once this has been signed by both parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.*

## Appendix 6: Interview questions for teachers

### Semi- Structured Interview Questions for Teacher After the Lesson

#### Background information:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. How long have you been teaching in preschool?
4. What is your highest academic qualification?
5. How many children do you have in your class?
6. What subjects do you teach?

#### Classroom:

7. Can you tell me what were your aims for teaching this lesson today?
8. Do you think your aims were achieved in this lesson?
9. What are your reflections on your teaching just now?
10. About your classroom, has it always been in this arrangement?  
(Classroom layout)
11. What has changed if anything?
12. How do you prepare your lesson plan?
13. Do you have a teacher assistant?
  - If yes, how do you use your teacher assistant?
  - If no, what is your opinion on having teacher assistant?
14. How supportive are the parents here with the changes implemented to preschool teaching and learning?
  - Examples of parental support
  - Do they attend parent teacher meeting?
  - Response from parents on showcase?
15. How supportive is your school staff and principal on the changes made to preschool teaching and learning?
  - Example of school staff and principal support

#### Curriculum:

16. Can you tell me about the preschool curriculum?
17. Are there any changes to the preschool curriculum? If, so what has changed?
18. Do the SPN21 preschool curriculum present a new vision of teaching and learning for the children?
  - Yes, or No?
  - Please explain your answer
19. Have the SPN21 preschool curriculum changed the role of teachers?
  - Yes, or No?
  - Please explain your answer
20. Have you encountered any difficulty in implementing the preschool curriculum?
  - Yes, or No?
  - Please explain your answer
  - Provide examples of situation
21. How were you trained to cope with the change?
22. What kind of support is provided to help you to deliver the changes in preschool teaching and learning?
  - Any examples?

23. What challenges do you have in the classroom, working with the required changes in teaching and learning?
24. What did you do to overcome those challenges?
25. What resources (e.g. information, material resources, training) do you have to implement the changes in teaching and learning Pra?
  - Are they sufficient?
  - Yes? If No, please explain what additional resources would assist your work
26. How do you assess children's development and learning?
27. What are the continuous professional development that you have attended?
  - Examples of workshops attended?
  - Is it sufficient?
  - What workshop or training would you like to attend?
28. In your opinion, how could the content of the Brunei preschool curriculum be improved?
29. In your opinion, how could the implementation process of the Brunei preschool curriculum be improved?
30. In your view, what are the key capacities that a preschool teacher or early childhood educator should have to meet required changes in teaching and learning Pra?
31. Are there any comments or suggestions you would like to add?

\*Give the teacher the attached paper and explain the instructions.

\*Give them time to draw – Ask them to explain their drawing. (Ensure I understood all the drawings and keep asking the teacher for clarification to their drawing).

## Appendix 7: Interview questions for the children

### **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Children** **\*switch on recorder, after having consent, to record**

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. How was school for you today?
  - What activities have you done today?
  - Can you tell me something that you have learned today?
4. What do you do every day in school?
5. Do you like coming to school?
  - If yes, what do you like about school?
  - If no, what makes you not liking school?
6. Have you made any projects?
  - If yes, what project did you make?
  - How did you make it?
  - Who helped you to make your project?
  - What do you think of making projects?
7. Have you participated at your class showcase?
  - If yes, what did you do for the showcase?
  - Do you like performing for the showcase?
  - What do you think when your work is displayed for the showcase for your parents and other people to see it?
8. What is your favourite class activity?
  - What do you have to do in that activity?
9. Can you draw anything that you like about your class/school?
  - Activities done today?
  - Give time for child to draw
  - Ask the child to explain his/her drawing.
10. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your experience or activities today?

## Appendix 8: Interview for senior officers

### **SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MOE, ECCE UNIT OFFICER (POLICY MAKER)**

**\*Additional questions will be added to compliment overall observations and interviews**

**\*switch on recorder after having consent to record**

1. Do the SPN21 preschool curriculum present a new vision of teaching and learning for the children?
  - Yes or No?
  - Please explain your answer
  
2. Have the SPN21 preschool curriculum changed the role of teachers?
  - Yes or No?
  - Please explain your answer
  
3. Have preschool teachers encountered any difficulty in implementing the preschool curriculum?
  - Yes or No?
  - Please explain your answer
  
4. What kind of support is provided to the preschool teachers to help them understand the preschool curriculum?
  - Any examples?
  
5. In your observation, what challenges do preschool teachers have in the classroom, working with the required changes in teaching and learning?
  
6. What do preschool teachers do to meet those challenges?

7. What resources (e.g. information, material resources, training) do they have to meet to implement the changes in teaching and learning Pra?
  - Are they sufficient?
  - Yes? If No, please explain what additional resources would assist your work
8. How do you assess children's development and learning?
9. In your opinion, how could the content of the Brunei preschool curriculum be improved?
10. In your opinion, how could the implementation process of the Brunei preschool curriculum be improved?
11. In your view, what are the key capacities that a preschool teacher or early childhood educator should have to meet required changes in teaching and learning Pra?
12. What is your view with this statement when teachers responded saying that they agree with the changes in teaching and learning for Pra but prefers changes to be introduced in phases?
13. Are there any comments or suggestions you would like to add?

**Thank you for your time**