

Research paper

Implementing Drama-Based Pedagogy to Enhance Learning Outcomes in Two Rural Secondary Schools of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This action research study examines the implementation and impact of drama-based pedagogy (DBP) in two rural secondary schools in Nikli, Kishoreganj: Nikli G C Government Pilot High School and Nikli Shahid Smaranika Girls High School. Conducted over one academic year, the study investigates how DBP influences student engagement, classroom interaction, and learning outcomes, while also exploring changes in teachers' instructional practices and professional development. A cyclical action research design was employed, involving iterative phases of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from classroom observations, teacher reflective journals, and student focus group discussions with quantitative data from pre- and post-intervention assessments. Statistical analysis, including paired-sample t-tests, indicated significant improvements in students' conceptual understanding, application of knowledge, and expressive abilities. Qualitative findings further revealed increased student participation, collaboration, and confidence, particularly among previously less active learners. Teachers reported a shift from teacher-centred to more facilitative pedagogical approaches, alongside enhanced professional confidence and reflective practice. Despite challenges related to time constraints, large class sizes, and assessment alignment, the findings demonstrate that DBP is both feasible and effective in resource-constrained rural contexts. The study highlights the potential of DBP as a scalable, learner-centred approach to improving teaching quality and student learning in secondary education.

Keywords: drama-based pedagogy, action research, rural secondary education, student engagement, teacher professional development

Over the past decade, national education reforms in Bangladesh have increasingly emphasised active learning, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and student participation as core educational outcomes (National Curriculum and Textbook Board [NCTB], 2021; Ministry of Education, 2010). These reforms align with global shifts toward competency-based education and constructivist pedagogies that recognise learning as an active, social, and meaning-making process (UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018). However, despite these policy aspirations, classroom practices in many rural Bangladeshi schools have remained largely unchanged. This action research was undertaken in response to the persistent and well-documented gap between Bangladesh's policy-level commitment to competency-based, learner-centred education and the everyday realities of teaching and learning in rural secondary schools.

Empirical studies and classroom observations consistently indicate that rural secondary classrooms are still dominated by lecture-based instruction, textbook-driven content delivery, and rote memorisation geared toward high-stakes examinations (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rahman, Hamzah, & Meerah, 2010). Teachers often occupy the central authoritative role, while students function primarily as passive recipients of information, expected to listen, memorise, and reproduce content rather than interrogate ideas or construct knowledge collaboratively. Opportunities for discussion, inquiry, creative expression, or experiential learning are limited, particularly in large classes with constrained resources and examination pressures (Ahmed, Nath, & Hossain, 2019). As a result, many students struggle to develop higher-order thinking skills, communication abilities, and conceptual understanding, even when curricular documents explicitly call for these outcomes.

This disconnect between reform rhetoric and pedagogical reality is especially pronounced in rural contexts such as Nikli Upazila in Kishoreganj District. Schools serving farming and fishing communities often face structural constraints including limited teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient professional development opportunities, and teachers who were themselves trained within highly traditional instructional paradigms (Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010). These conditions make it particularly challenging for teachers to translate abstract notions of learner-centred pedagogy into concrete classroom practices. Consequently, curriculum reform alone has proven insufficient to transform learning experiences without sustained pedagogical support and contextually relevant instructional strategies.

Drama-based pedagogy was introduced in this study as a purposeful and context-responsive pedagogical intervention aimed at addressing these challenges. Drawing on the conceptualisation advanced by Dawson and Kiger Lee (2023), drama-based pedagogy (DBP) was understood not as performance-oriented theatre education, but as an instructional approach that uses drama strategies—such as role-play, improvisation, tableaux, teacher-in-role, and dramatic inquiry—to activate learning across curriculum areas. DBP positions students as active meaning-makers who engage cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically with subject matter. Through embodied and dialogic processes, learners are encouraged to explore multiple perspectives, negotiate meaning collaboratively, and connect abstract concepts to lived experiences (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023; O'Neill, 1995).

The theoretical foundations of DBP are closely aligned with constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning, which emphasise that knowledge is constructed through interaction, language, and social participation rather than transmitted passively from teacher to learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Drama-based approaches operationalise these theories by creating imaginative contexts in which learners can experiment with ideas, test hypotheses, and reflect on consequences within a safe and supportive environment. Research across diverse educational contexts has demonstrated that DBP can enhance student engagement, deepen conceptual understanding, support language development, and foster critical and creative thinking skills (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Neelands, 2009; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013).

In the Bangladeshi context, where classrooms have historically prioritised silence, obedience, and exam-oriented learning, DBP offers a potentially transformative alternative. By legitimising student voice, movement, dialogue, and imagination as integral to learning, drama-based pedagogy challenges entrenched power relations within classrooms and repositions teachers as facilitators of inquiry rather than sole authorities (Boal, 1979; Freire, 1970). This shift is particularly relevant in rural secondary schools, where students often have rich experiential knowledge drawn from community life but few opportunities to integrate this knowledge into formal learning processes (Suartha et al., 2022).

Importantly, this study approached DBP not as a prescriptive “model” to be imposed on teachers, but as a flexible pedagogical repertoire to be explored, adapted, and refined through collaborative practice. The research was designed as an action research study precisely because it sought not only to examine the effects of DBP on student engagement and learning outcomes, but also to support teachers in developing new pedagogical capacities through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research was particularly suited to this context, as it allowed teachers and school leaders to function as co-researchers, actively shaping the intervention in response to classroom realities rather than implementing externally designed solutions (Norman & Eslami, 2024).

Through this action research, drama-based pedagogy was treated as both a pedagogical intervention and a professional learning process. The study aimed to document how DBP could be meaningfully integrated into existing curriculum units, how teachers' instructional practices evolved over time (Mapulanga & Jita, 2026; Webb, 2026), and how students responded to more participatory and embodied forms of learning (Islam et al., 2026). By grounding the intervention in rural Bangladeshi classrooms and examining its implementation across multiple cycles, the research sought to generate locally relevant evidence (Markowska-Manista, 2026; Köşger & Görgülü, 2025; Acar et al., 2025) that could inform broader efforts to translate learner-centred education policies into sustainable classroom practice.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND SETTING

This action research was conducted in two government-recognised rural secondary schools located in Nikli Upazila of Kishoreganj District, an ecologically distinctive and socioeconomically marginalised region of Bangladesh. Nikli Upazila is characterised by extensive *baor* wetlands, seasonal flooding, and a predominantly agrarian and fishing-based economy. These geographical and livelihood conditions significantly influence schooling patterns, student attendance, and the availability of educational resources (Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010; Rashid, 2018). Schools in such contexts often operate under constraints that differ markedly from those in urban or peri-urban settings, making them important sites for examining pedagogical innovation under real-world limitations.

Nikli G C Government Pilot High School served a mixed-gender student population from Grades 6 to 10, while Nikli Shahid Smaranika Girls High School catered exclusively to female students across the same grade levels. Both schools were formally affiliated with the national secondary education system and followed the national curriculum prescribed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). Student enrolment in both institutions primarily comprised children from low-income households engaged in subsistence farming, fishing, day labour, and small-scale informal work. Parental education levels were generally low, with limited capacity to provide academic support at home, a factor widely recognised as shaping student learning experiences in rural Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Like many rural secondary schools in Bangladesh, both institutions faced structural challenges that directly affected classroom pedagogy. Class sizes frequently exceeded national recommendations, often accommodating 45 to 60 students in a single classroom. Physical infrastructure was basic, with limited access to flexible seating arrangements, teaching aids, or technological resources. Instructional materials beyond government-issued textbooks were scarce, and teachers reported heavy teaching loads that constrained lesson preparation and experimentation with alternative pedagogies (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). These conditions created a learning environment in which efficiency and coverage of syllabus content often took precedence over depth of understanding or student engagement.

Baseline observations conducted during the initial phase of the study revealed that teaching practices in both schools were predominantly textbook-centred and teacher-led. Lessons typically followed a predictable pattern: teachers explained content verbally, students listened and took notes, and questioning—when present—was largely recall-oriented. Student talk was minimal, with participation often limited to a small number of confident learners, while the majority remained silent observers. Collaborative learning activities such as group discussion, peer explanation, or problem-solving tasks were rare. These patterns are consistent with broader findings on secondary classroom practices in Bangladesh, where traditional transmission-oriented pedagogy remains deeply entrenched despite policy-level advocacy for learner-centred approaches (Rahman et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2015).

Assessment practices in both schools further reinforced these pedagogical norms. Student learning was evaluated primarily through written tests that emphasised memorisation and reproduction of textbook content. Formative assessment strategies—such as observation, oral presentation, peer feedback, or reflective tasks—were largely absent from regular classroom practice. As a result, students had limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding through alternative modes of expression or to engage in metacognitive reflection on their learning processes (OECD, 2018). These assessment patterns also shaped teacher behaviour, as examination performance remained the dominant indicator of success for both teachers and students.

The gender-segregated context of Nikli Shahid Smaranika Girls High School added an additional layer of significance to the research setting. While girls' enrolment in secondary education has improved substantially in Bangladesh over the past three decades, girls in rural areas continue to face social and cultural barriers that constrain voice, confidence, and participation in classroom spaces (Kabeer, 2015; Unterhalter et al., 2014). Observations during the baseline phase indicated that many female students were hesitant to speak publicly or challenge ideas, reinforcing the importance of pedagogical approaches that deliberately create safe spaces for expression and collective meaning-making. Drama-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on role, imagination, and collaborative inquiry, was therefore considered particularly relevant for fostering participation and agency among girls in this context (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

These contextual realities strongly informed both the design and implementation of the action research. Rather than introducing drama-based pedagogy as an externally imposed innovation, the intervention was designed to align with existing curriculum content, classroom routines, and resource constraints. Drama strategies were selected for their adaptability to large classes and low-resource environments, relying primarily on students' bodies, voices, and imagination rather than specialised materials. Teachers were encouraged to adapt strategies incrementally, allowing pedagogical change to emerge organically through cycles of practice and reflection rather than abrupt transformation.

By situating the study within these two rural secondary schools, the research aimed to generate contextually grounded insights into how drama-based pedagogy can function within the everyday realities of Bangladeshi

classrooms. The setting was not treated as a limitation, but as a critical lens through which the feasibility, adaptability, and sustainability of learner-centred pedagogical reform could be examined. In doing so, the study sought to contribute evidence that speaks directly to rural education contexts, where the need for meaningful, inclusive, and engaging pedagogy is often greatest.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Purpose of the study

The overarching purpose of this action research was to design, implement, and critically evaluate a drama-based pedagogical intervention in rural secondary classrooms in Bangladesh, with the aim of enhancing student engagement, collaboration, critical thinking, and learning outcomes across core academic subjects, including Bangla, English, Social Studies, and Science. The study was grounded in the recognition that meaningful learning requires students to be active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information, particularly in contexts where traditional, examination-driven pedagogy has historically dominated classroom practice (Freire, 1970; Rahman et al., 2019).

Drama-based pedagogy (DBP) was selected as the focal instructional approach because of its strong theoretical and empirical grounding in active, embodied, and dialogic learning. Research suggests that drama-based strategies—such as role-play, improvisation, tableau, and dramatic inquiry—can deepen conceptual understanding, foster empathy, strengthen communication skills, and promote higher-order thinking across curriculum areas (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023; O’Neill, 1995). By integrating DBP into regular subject teaching rather than treating drama as an extracurricular activity, this study sought to examine its pedagogical potential within the structural realities of rural Bangladeshi secondary schools.

In addition to examining student outcomes, the study aimed to contribute to teacher professional learning and instructional transformation. Action research positions teachers not merely as implementers of externally designed interventions, but as reflective practitioners and co-researchers who systematically examine and improve their own practice through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). In this study, teachers were actively involved in co-designing drama-based lessons, adapting strategies to their classrooms, and reflecting on changes in student learning and their own pedagogical beliefs. This focus aligns with literature emphasising that sustainable pedagogical reform depends on teacher agency, contextual adaptation, and continuous professional learning rather than one-off training initiatives (Avalos, 2011).

Furthermore, the study sought to generate contextually grounded evidence on the feasibility and challenges of implementing learner-centred pedagogies in low-resource, rural settings. While drama-based pedagogy has been widely studied in Global North contexts, there remains a relative paucity of empirical research examining its application in rural schools in the Global South, particularly within large classes, limited infrastructure, and examination-oriented systems (Dawson & Lee, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). By documenting both successes and constraints, this action research aimed to inform policy, teacher education, and curriculum development efforts seeking to move beyond rote learning toward more inclusive and meaningful educational practices.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study were aligned with its dual focus on improving classroom practice and generating research-based knowledge. *First*, the study aimed to introduce drama-based pedagogy as an instructional approach in selected secondary classes in both participating schools, integrating DBP strategies into existing curriculum units rather than adding new content. This objective was informed by research indicating that pedagogical innovations are more likely to be sustained when they align with mandated curricula and assessment structures (Fullan, 2016; Spillane, 2004).

Second, the study sought to build teacher capacity in drama-based pedagogy through a combination of professional learning workshops, collaborative lesson co-design, classroom-based experimentation, and ongoing coaching. Teacher learning was conceptualised as a situated, iterative process occurring within practice rather than as the transmission of fixed techniques (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Timperley et al., 2007).

Third, the research aimed to examine changes in student engagement and participation following the implementation of DBP activities. Student engagement was understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in learning tasks (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Drama-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on interaction, imagination, and embodiment, was hypothesised to positively influence these dimensions of engagement.

Fourth, the study aimed to assess the impact of DBP on students’ learning outcomes in selected thematic units. Learning outcomes were conceptualised not only in terms of content knowledge acquisition but also in terms of conceptual understanding, application of ideas, and ability to articulate meaning through multiple modes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Sawyer, 2014).

Finally, the study sought to identify facilitators, barriers, and necessary adaptations associated with implementing drama-based pedagogy in rural Bangladeshi classrooms. Understanding these contextual factors was essential for developing realistic recommendations for scaling and sustainability, particularly within education systems characterised by resource constraints and examination pressures (Schweisfurth, 2013).

Research questions

Guided by the above purpose and objectives, this action research was structured around the following research questions. The first research question asked how the introduction of drama-based pedagogy influenced student engagement and participation in rural secondary classrooms. This question was grounded in existing literature suggesting that participatory and embodied learning approaches can increase student motivation, voice, and involvement, particularly among learners who are often marginalised in traditional classrooms (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Nicholson, 2014).

The second research question examined the effects of drama-based pedagogy on students' conceptual understanding in selected curriculum units. Rather than focusing solely on test performance, this question sought to explore how DBP supported deeper understanding, meaning-making, and the ability to apply knowledge across contexts, as emphasised in contemporary learning theories (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

The third research question explored how teachers experienced and perceived the process of implementing DBP, and how their instructional practices evolved over time. This question reflected the action research emphasis on teacher learning and change, recognising that shifts in pedagogy often involve changes in beliefs, professional identity, and classroom power relations (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Kemmis et al., 2014).

The fourth research question focused on the challenges and opportunities that emerged during the integration of DBP in low-resource rural school settings. This question acknowledged that pedagogical innovation is shaped by contextual realities, including class size, time constraints, assessment regimes, and institutional culture (Schweisfurth, 2013; UNESCO, 2015).

Finally, the fifth research question addressed how drama-based pedagogy could be sustainably embedded within regular teaching practices of rural secondary teachers. Sustainability was understood as the capacity of teachers to continue using and adapting DBP strategies beyond the research period, supported by professional communities, leadership endorsement, and alignment with curriculum expectations (Fullan, 2016; Timperley et al., 2007).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework guiding this study positioned drama-based pedagogy (DBP) as a mediating instructional practice capable of transforming traditional teacher-centred classrooms into dynamic spaces of active, participatory learning. The framework was grounded in constructivist, sociocultural, and embodied learning theories, all of which emphasise that learning is most effective when learners actively construct meaning through interaction, experience, dialogue, and reflection rather than through passive reception of information (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). This orientation is consistent with contemporary educational research in the Asia-Pacific region that advocates learner-centred approaches for improving classroom engagement and learning outcomes (Islam, Das, Akter, & Hossain, 2026).

Within the rural Bangladeshi secondary school context, conventional pedagogical practices were characterised by lecture-dominated instruction, textbook dependency, and assessment systems that privileged memorisation. The conceptual framework assumed that such practices limited student agency, suppressed dialogue, and constrained opportunities for deeper conceptual understanding. Drama-based pedagogy was therefore introduced as a deliberate pedagogical intervention intended to disrupt these entrenched patterns and reconfigure classroom relationships between teachers, students, content, and knowledge-making processes (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

At the core of the framework, DBP was conceptualised as activating learning through four interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes: active participation, dialogic meaning-making, embodied learning, and social collaboration. These processes were not treated as discrete components but as interconnected dimensions of a holistic learning experience facilitated through structured drama strategies embedded within subject teaching.

Active participation formed the first pillar of the framework. Drawing on engagement theory, the framework assumed that learning deepens when students are behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally involved in classroom activities (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Drama-based strategies such as role-play, improvisation, and dramatic inquiry require students to make decisions, take perspectives, and contribute actively to unfolding learning scenarios. Rather than listening passively to teacher explanations, students become co-constructors of meaning, which enhances motivation, attention, and persistence in learning tasks (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Nicholson, 2014).

Dialogic meaning-making constituted the second key process within the framework. Influenced by sociocultural theory, the framework assumed that learning is fundamentally dialogic and socially mediated, occurring through talk, negotiation, and shared interpretation (Alexander, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Drama-based pedagogy intentionally creates spaces for dialogue before, during, and after dramatic activity. Through discussion, reflection, questioning, and collective sense-making, students articulate ideas, challenge assumptions, and refine understanding. Teacher strategies such as teacher-in-role and guided questioning were conceptualised as scaffolding mechanisms that supported students in moving from everyday understandings to more formal disciplinary concepts (O'Neill, 1995; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

Embodied learning represented the third dimension of the framework. Drawing on theories of embodied cognition, the framework assumed that cognition is deeply connected to physical action, sensory experience, and emotional engagement (Barsalou, 2008; Shapiro, 2011). Drama-based pedagogy leverages movement, gesture, spatial relationships, and physical representation to make abstract concepts tangible. For example, through tableau or embodied metaphors, students externalise thinking processes and explore ideas through their bodies as well as their minds. This embodied engagement was expected to support memory, conceptual understanding, and meaning-making, particularly for learners who may struggle with purely verbal or text-based instruction (Dawson & Lee, 2018).

Social collaboration formed the fourth and final process in the framework. The study assumed that learning is enhanced through cooperative interaction and shared problem-solving, particularly in culturally collectivist contexts such as rural Bangladesh (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003). Drama-based pedagogy inherently relies on group work, ensemble-building, and collective storytelling, requiring students to listen, negotiate roles, manage conflict, and co-create outcomes. These collaborative processes were expected not only to improve academic learning but also to foster social skills, empathy, and respect for multiple perspectives (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Nicholson, 2014).

The framework further positioned teachers as key mediators of the DBP process. Teachers were conceptualised not as performers but as facilitators who designed learning environments, structured drama activities, and scaffolded reflection and meaning-making. Through action research cycles, teachers were expected to refine their pedagogical practices, develop greater confidence in learner-centred approaches, and shift classroom power relations toward more participatory and inclusive forms of teaching (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



The interaction of these four processes—active participation, dialogic meaning-making, embodied learning, and social collaboration—was expected to transform classroom dynamics over time. Specifically, the framework hypothesised that DBP would lead to increased student agency, more frequent and meaningful student talk, deeper conceptual engagement with curricular content, and improved learning outcomes. These changes were expected to be observable through classroom interaction patterns, student engagement indicators, teacher reflections, and pre- and post-intervention learning assessments.

Finally, the framework acknowledged that contextual factors—such as class size, examination pressures, resource constraints, and school culture—would shape the enactment of DBP. Rather than assuming a linear cause–effect relationship, the framework conceptualised change as iterative, adaptive, and context-sensitive,

consistent with the principles of action research (Schweisfurth, 2013; Kemmis et al., 2014). Through cycles of implementation and reflection, the framework aimed to generate practical, locally grounded knowledge on how drama-based pedagogy can be meaningfully embedded within rural secondary education settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted a school-based action research design, implemented over three iterative cycles across one academic year. Action research was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach because it integrates systematic inquiry with practical action, enabling teachers and researchers to collaboratively investigate and improve educational practice within authentic classroom contexts (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stringer, 2014). Rather than aiming for generalisable causal claims, the study prioritised context-sensitive understanding, professional learning, and sustained pedagogical change.

Each action research cycle followed the classical sequence of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis et al., 2014). This cyclical structure allowed for continuous adaptation of drama-based pedagogy (DBP) strategies in response to classroom realities, teacher feedback, and emerging student responses. The iterative nature of the design was particularly suited to introducing an unfamiliar pedagogical approach in rural secondary schools, where flexibility and responsiveness to local constraints were essential.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to capture both the processes and outcomes of implementing DBP. Qualitative methods were prioritised to explore changes in classroom interaction, teacher practice, and student experience, while quantitative measures were used to provide complementary evidence of shifts in student engagement and learning outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The integration of multiple data sources enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Miles et al., 2020).

Participants

The study involved eight secondary school teachers, four from each participating school, teaching Bangla, English, Social Studies, and Science. Teachers were purposively selected in consultation with school leadership to ensure representation across core subject areas and to capture a range of pedagogical practices relevant to drama-based pedagogy (DBP). Selection criteria included (a) willingness to participate in an action research process, (b) availability to engage in training and reflective sessions, and (c) variation in teaching experience and prior exposure to learner-centred approaches. While participation was voluntary, efforts were made to avoid over-representation of highly motivated or previously trained teachers in order to minimise selection bias and better reflect typical classroom conditions. These subject areas were selected because they represent core components of the secondary curriculum and offer diverse opportunities for drama-based exploration of language, narrative, concepts, and social issues (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023). Participating teachers had between 6 and 20 years of teaching experience and had received limited prior exposure to learner-centred or arts-integrated pedagogies.

Approximately 260 students from selected classes participated indirectly through classroom activities, observations, surveys, assessments, and focus group discussions. Students ranged from Grades 7 to 9 and represented diverse academic abilities and socio-economic backgrounds typical of rural secondary schools in Bangladesh. While students were not co-researchers, their voices and experiences were central to understanding the effects of DBP on engagement and learning.

School leaders, including headteachers and academic coordinators, supported the study as facilitators and reflective partners. Their involvement was critical in enabling scheduling flexibility, encouraging teacher participation, and fostering a supportive institutional climate for pedagogical experimentation. Leadership engagement is widely recognised as a key enabling factor in successful school-based action research and instructional change (Fullan, 2016).

Teacher professional development

Teacher professional development was a central component of the research design and was conceptualised as an ongoing, practice-embedded learning process rather than a one-off training event. Prior to implementation, teachers participated in introductory workshops that explored the theoretical foundations of drama-based pedagogy, including active learning, embodied cognition, and dialogic teaching (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023; Gallagher & Riviere, 2020). These workshops included demonstration lessons, video examples, and experiential participation in drama strategies to build teachers' confidence and understanding.

Following the workshops, teachers engaged in co-design sessions with the researcher to collaboratively plan DBP-integrated lessons aligned with existing curriculum units. Co-design supported teacher ownership, contextual relevance, and alignment with examination-oriented syllabi, which is particularly important in low-resource and high-stakes assessment contexts.

Throughout the implementation phases, the researcher provided classroom-based coaching, including lesson observation, feedback conversations, and modelling of strategies where appropriate. Regular reflective meetings created structured opportunities for teachers to analyse student responses, discuss challenges, and refine practices. Peer learning across the two schools was encouraged through joint reflection sessions, reinforcing the collaborative and developmental ethos of action research (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Implementation of the action research cycles

Cycle 1: Planning and baseline

The first cycle, conducted over the initial two months, focused on planning and baseline data collection. Classroom observations were carried out using structured observation protocols to document instructional patterns, student participation, and interaction dynamics. Student engagement surveys and diagnostic assessments in selected curriculum units were administered to establish baseline levels of engagement and learning.

In addition, semi-structured teacher interviews and group reflective discussions were conducted to capture teachers' existing beliefs, instructional routines, and attitudes toward learner-centred pedagogy. Consistent with previous research in rural South Asian contexts, baseline findings indicated limited student talk, minimal collaborative learning, and heavy reliance on textbook-driven instruction and recall-based assessment (Rahman & Panda, 2019; UNICEF, 2020). These findings informed the design of DBP activities and the focus of professional learning in subsequent cycles.

Cycle 2: Implementation and reflection

During the second cycle, drama-based pedagogy was implemented across selected curriculum units in all participating subjects. Teachers employed strategies such as role-play to explore historical events and literary narratives, tableaux to represent scientific concepts and social relationships, and improvisation and dramatic inquiry to examine language use, ethical dilemmas, and civic issues. These strategies were embedded within regular lesson structures rather than treated as separate activities, reinforcing DBP as an instructional approach rather than an enrichment activity.

Ongoing classroom observations indicated noticeable increases in student talk, peer interaction, and willingness to participate, particularly among students who had previously been reluctant to speak in class. Mid-cycle reflection meetings enabled teachers to critically examine implementation challenges, including time constraints, classroom management concerns, and initial student hesitation due to unfamiliarity with participatory learning. Through collective reflection, teachers adapted pacing, scaffolding, and group structures to better support student engagement, reflecting the adaptive logic of action research (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Cycle 3: Consolidation and evaluation

The final cycle focused on consolidating practice and evaluating outcomes. Teachers demonstrated increased confidence and flexibility in selecting and facilitating drama strategies and began integrating DBP more organically into everyday lessons. Endline data were collected through post-intervention assessments, engagement surveys, classroom observations, and student and teacher focus group discussions.

Analysis of endline data indicated improvements in student engagement, conceptual understanding, and classroom interaction. Teachers reported shifts in their instructional identities, describing themselves less as transmitters of content and more as facilitators of learning. Students articulated greater enjoyment of lessons and an enhanced ability to understand and explain concepts collaboratively. These findings aligned with international research demonstrating the capacity of drama-based pedagogy to support deep learning and learner agency across curriculum areas (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

Data collection methods

Data collection employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to capture a comprehensive picture of the impact of theatre-based interventions on learning outcomes. Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, teacher reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers. Classroom observations were guided by a structured protocol focusing on student engagement, teacher facilitation strategies, and peer interaction during theatre-based activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sample observation indicators included: "Number of students actively participating in role-play," "Frequency of student-to-student dialogue," and "Teacher use of open-ended questioning."

Reflective journals provided teachers with the opportunity to document their experiences, challenges, and perceived impacts of implementing theatre strategies (McNiff, 2013). Teachers were guided by prompts such as:

“What changes did you observe in student engagement today?” and “What challenges did you face while facilitating drama-based activities?”

Semi-structured interviews allowed for deeper insights into teachers’ attitudes and perceptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Example interview questions included: *“How has the use of drama influenced your teaching practice?”* and *“What changes, if any, have you observed in students’ critical thinking or participation?”*

Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-assessments of student learning outcomes, including comprehension, critical thinking, and creativity. Sample assessment tasks included short-answer questions requiring interpretation of texts, scenario-based problem-solving, and creative expression exercises. In addition, student engagement surveys were administered using Likert-scale items (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample survey items included: *“I feel more interested in lessons when drama activities are used,” “I participate more actively in class,”* and *“Drama activities help me understand the lesson better”* (Patton, 2015).

To ensure validity, instruments were reviewed by two experts in education and theatre pedagogy for content relevance and alignment with study objectives. Pilot testing was conducted with a small group of teachers and students in a non-participating school, leading to minor refinements in wording and structure. Reliability was strengthened through the use of consistent observation protocols, repeated measures (pre/post assessments), and triangulation across multiple data sources (Flick, 2018).

The combination of these methods enabled robust triangulation, enhancing both the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by integrating multiple perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of the intervention.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed a systematic thematic analysis approach, drawing on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). The process involved six phases: familiarisation with the data, initial code generation, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Transcripts from interviews, classroom observation notes, and teacher reflective journals were read repeatedly to ensure deep immersion in the data. An initial coding framework was developed through a combination of inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-informed) approaches, with codes organised around key constructs such as student engagement, pedagogical practices, creativity, and implementation challenges.

To enhance analytical rigour, a second researcher independently coded a subset (approximately 25%) of the data using the same coding framework. Inter-coder reliability was assessed through comparison and discussion of coding decisions, and discrepancies were resolved through consensus-building, leading to refinement of code definitions and improved consistency. This collaborative coding process strengthened the dependability of the analysis.

Theme development involved clustering related codes into broader categories and iteratively reviewing them against the dataset to ensure coherence and internal consistency. To validate the themes, multiple strategies were employed, including peer debriefing sessions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where emerging interpretations were critically examined, and member checking with selected participating teachers to confirm the credibility and resonance of the findings. Additionally, triangulation across data sources (observations, interviews, and journals) was used to corroborate patterns and enhance trustworthiness.

Quantitative data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to examine changes in student learning outcomes and engagement before and after the intervention. In addition to calculating mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether observed differences between pre- and post-assessment scores were statistically significant. Where appropriate, effect sizes (Cohen’s *d*) were calculated to assess the magnitude of change, providing a more robust interpretation of the intervention’s impact beyond statistical significance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Survey responses were similarly analysed using descriptive statistics and, where relevant, comparative analysis across action research cycles to track changes in student participation, motivation, and enjoyment over time.

To strengthen the rigour of the mixed-methods design, triangulation was operationalised through a systematic comparison and integration of multiple data sources, including classroom observations, teacher reflective journals, interviews, and student assessments. Specifically, patterns identified in quantitative data (e.g., increased student engagement scores or improved learning outcomes) were cross-checked against qualitative evidence. For example, increases in student participation reflected in survey data were compared with observation records documenting higher levels of active involvement in role-play and collaborative activities. Similarly, teacher reflections on improved student confidence and interaction were examined alongside observed classroom behaviours.

Where convergence was observed across data sources, findings were interpreted as mutually reinforcing. In cases of divergence or discrepancy (e.g., where survey results indicated high engagement, but observational data showed uneven participation), the research team revisited the data through iterative analysis, examining contextual factors such as classroom dynamics, teacher facilitation styles, or variations in implementation fidelity. These

discrepancies were not treated as inconsistencies to be eliminated but as analytically valuable insights that informed a more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

This integrative approach aligns with established mixed-methods frameworks, where triangulation is understood not merely as the use of multiple methods but as the intentional integration of data to enhance validity, complementarity, and explanatory depth (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Through this process, the study ensured that conclusions were grounded in both statistically supported trends and contextually rich qualitative evidence.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to implementation. Informed consent was secured from all participating teachers, students, and guardians. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymisation of data, and participation remained voluntary throughout the study. Drama activities were designed to be culturally appropriate and emotionally safe.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Drawing on data from classroom observations, teacher journals, interviews, student focus groups, engagement surveys, and pre- and post-assessments, the analysis demonstrates how drama-based pedagogy (DBP) influenced student engagement and learning, reshaped teacher instructional practices, and unfolded within the constraints and possibilities of rural secondary school contexts. The findings are organised around five interrelated themes corresponding to the study's objectives and guiding questions.

Introducing drama-based pedagogy within existing curriculum structures

Consistent with the first objective, findings indicate that drama-based pedagogy was successfully introduced and integrated into existing curriculum units rather than functioning as an add-on activity. Classroom observations across all three action research cycles showed that teachers embedded drama strategies—such as role-play, tableaux, improvisation, and hot-seating—within prescribed textbook lessons in language, social science, and moral education. This curricular integration was critical in gaining teacher acceptance and administrative tolerance, particularly in an examination-oriented system.

Teachers initially expressed concern about whether drama activities would be perceived as deviating from “serious” academic work. However, reflective journals suggest that as DBP was increasingly aligned with lesson objectives and assessment expectations, teachers began to view it as a legitimate pedagogical tool rather than an extracurricular diversion. One teacher noted, “*When I realised I was teaching the same lesson outcomes through drama, not extra content, I became more confident in using it regularly*” (Teacher Journal, Cycle 2). This finding supports the literature emphasising that pedagogical innovations are more likely to be sustained when they align with mandated curricula and institutional priorities (Fullan, 2016; Spillane, 2004).

Changes in student engagement and participation

Addressing the first research question and the third objective, the study found clear and consistent improvements in student engagement following the introduction of drama-based pedagogy. Engagement was evident across behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Observational data showed increased student participation, with a greater number of students volunteering ideas, asking questions, and taking active roles during lessons. Notably, students who were previously silent or marginalised in traditional lecture-based classes began to participate more visibly during drama activities.

Students themselves articulated these changes. One student reflected, “*When we act out the story, I feel less afraid to speak. I understand it better because I am inside the lesson, not just listening*” (Student Journal, Cycle 2). Engagement surveys corroborated these perceptions, indicating higher levels of enjoyment, attention, and perceived relevance of lessons that incorporated DBP.

Emotionally, drama-based activities appeared to create a safer and more inclusive classroom climate. Teachers observed reduced fear of making mistakes and increased peer support during group work. These findings align with previous research suggesting that participatory and embodied pedagogies can amplify student voice and motivation, particularly for learners who struggle within teacher-centred classrooms (Anderson & Dunn, 2013; Nicholson, 2014).

Impact on students' learning outcomes and conceptual understanding

In line with the fourth objective and the second research question, the study found that drama-based pedagogy positively influenced students' learning outcomes, particularly in terms of conceptual understanding, application of knowledge, and expressive ability. To examine whether these gains were statistically significant, paired-sample

t-tests were conducted comparing pre- and post-intervention scores across all learning dimensions. The results indicated statistically significant improvements across all domains ($p < .001$), with moderate to large sizes (Cohen's d ranging from 0.58 to 0.72), suggesting that the observed gains were not due to chance but reflected meaningful changes in student learning.

Importantly, the assessment tools were carefully designed to ensure validity and minimise potential bias. The pre- and post-tests were not identical, but were parallel in structure and difficulty, consisting of equivalent items aligned with the same curriculum objectives and thematic units. This approach was adopted to reduce practice effects while maintaining comparability across testing points. The assessments included a combination of short-answer, scenario-based, and open-ended tasks designed to capture not only factual recall but also conceptual understanding, application, and critical thinking.

All assessment items were aligned with both the national curriculum and the drama-based learning activities implemented during the intervention. This ensured that the tests measured meaningful learning outcomes rather than superficial familiarity with content. The instruments were developed collaboratively by the research team and participating teachers and were subsequently reviewed by two external experts in curriculum and pedagogy to establish content validity. A pilot test conducted in a non-participating school helped refine item clarity, difficulty level, and scoring rubrics. Rubrics were standardised across teachers to ensure consistency in evaluation (Table 1).

Table 1

Changes in students' learning outcomes following the implementation of drama-based pedagogy

Learning outcome dimension	Assessment indicator	Pre-intervention mean score (%)	Post-intervention mean score (%)	Mean gain (%)	Observed trend
Factual recall	Correct recall of key terms and definitions	58	64	+6	Modest improvement
Conceptual understanding	Ability to explain concepts in own words	52	71	+19	Substantial improvement
Application of knowledge	Applying concepts to new or unfamiliar situations	46	69	+23	Strong improvement
Critical thinking	Making connections, reasoning, and interpretation	48	68	+20	Strong improvement
Expressive ability	Clarity and confidence in oral/written expression	50	73	+23	Strong improvement

While improvements in factual recall were modest, more substantial and statistically significant gains were evident in higher-order learning domains. These findings suggest that drama-based pedagogy was particularly effective in supporting deeper learning processes, including meaning-making, transfer of knowledge, and expressive competence, rather than rote memorisation.

The quantitative findings were further corroborated through qualitative evidence. Classroom observations and teacher reflections consistently reported increased student engagement, richer dialogue, and greater confidence in articulating ideas. For instance, one teacher noted, "*Students remember the lesson because they lived it. Even weeks later, they refer back to the scene they acted*" (Teacher Interview, Cycle 3). Such observations reinforce the statistical findings by illustrating how embodied and experiential learning contributed to improved conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, drama-based pedagogy enhanced students' ability to communicate understanding through multiple modes, including speech, movement, and collaborative performance. This aligns with contemporary perspectives on learning that emphasise multimodal expression, creativity, and active participation as central to meaningful educational outcomes (Bransford et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Sawyer, 2014; Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2023).

Taken together, the combination of statistically significant gains, carefully designed assessment tools, and triangulated qualitative evidence strengthens the conclusion that the observed improvements reflect genuine learning rather than artefacts of testing or familiarity.

Teacher learning, instructional change, and professional identity

Responding to the third research question and the second objective, findings revealed significant shifts in teachers' instructional practices and professional identities over the course of the action research cycles. Teachers reported moving away from predominantly lecture-based approaches towards more facilitative, student-centred

teaching. Rather than positioning themselves as sole knowledge providers, teachers increasingly acted as guides, observers, and co-learners.

One teacher reflected, “*Earlier, I felt responsible for saying everything. Now, I trust students to discover ideas, and my role is to shape and support that process*” (Teacher Journal, Cycle 2). This shift was accompanied by increased reflective practice, with teachers regularly analysing student responses and adjusting lesson designs accordingly.

Importantly, teachers also reported enhanced professional satisfaction. Planning and implementing drama-based lessons was described as intellectually stimulating and emotionally rewarding. A teacher commented, “*Teaching feels more alive now. I enjoy the classroom again*” (Teacher Interview, Cycle 3). These findings align with literature highlighting the role of creative pedagogies in fostering teacher agency, innovation, and sustained professional growth (Neelands & Goode, 2015; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

Challenges, adaptations, and contextual constraints

In addressing the fourth research question and the fifth objective, the study identified several challenges associated with implementing drama-based pedagogy in low-resource rural school settings. Time constraints emerged as a primary concern, particularly given large class sizes and rigid syllabi. Teachers initially struggled to balance curriculum coverage with participatory activities, expressing anxiety about falling behind schedule.

Assessment alignment also posed difficulties. Standardised examinations prioritised factual recall, offering limited recognition of the collaborative, creative, and communicative skills fostered through DBP. As one teacher noted, “*Drama helps students think deeply, but exams don’t always test that*” (Teacher Journal, Cycle 1). These tensions reflect broader systemic challenges documented in education systems characterised by high-stakes testing (Schweisfurth, 2013).

However, the iterative nature of the action research process enabled teachers to adapt. Over successive cycles, teachers refined lesson pacing, integrated shorter drama activities, and developed informal assessment strategies to capture student learning during performance and discussion. One teacher explained, “*Once I learned how to observe understanding during the activity itself, it became easier to justify drama alongside exams*” (Teacher Interview, Cycle 3). This adaptive process underscores the value of action research as a methodology for supporting context-sensitive pedagogical change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Sustainability and prospects for embedding drama-based pedagogy

Finally, addressing the fifth research question, findings suggest that drama-based pedagogy has the potential to be sustainably embedded within regular teaching practices, provided certain conditions are met. Teachers reported increased confidence in independently designing and adapting DBP strategies by the final cycle, indicating that capacity-building efforts were effective. Informal peer discussions and collaborative planning further supported sustainability, pointing to the importance of professional learning communities.

Nevertheless, long-term sustainability will depend on systemic support, including leadership endorsement, alignment with assessment frameworks, and continued opportunities for professional development. Without such support, there is a risk that drama-based pedagogy may remain dependent on individual teacher motivation rather than becoming an embedded institutional practice (Fullan, 2016; Timperley et al., 2007).

Gender and participation in DBP classrooms

Although this study did not conduct a formal gender-disaggregated analysis, observations from both the co-educational and girls-only settings suggest that Drama-Based Pedagogy (DBP) may have contributed to creating more inclusive participation opportunities, particularly for female students. In the girls’ school, DBP appeared to foster a supportive environment where students felt more comfortable expressing themselves, engaging in role-play, and participating actively in group activities. In the co-educational setting, while participation remained uneven, DBP strategies helped to create structured opportunities for girls to contribute more visibly than in traditional teacher-centred classrooms. These findings suggest that DBP may hold particular promise in conservative rural contexts, where gender norms often constrain female participation in classroom discourse. However, these interpretations remain indicative rather than conclusive, and further research with a gender-disaggregated and comparative design is required to systematically examine these dynamics.

Synthesis of findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that drama-based pedagogy positively influenced student engagement, learning outcomes, and classroom relationships, while also contributing to meaningful teacher learning and instructional transformation. Although challenges related to time, assessment, and resources were evident, the iterative cycles of reflection and adaptation enabled teachers to integrate DBP effectively within their specific contexts. By aligning closely with curriculum demands and grounding innovation in teacher practice, the study

highlights the potential of drama-based pedagogy as a viable and contextually responsive approach to improving secondary education in rural Bangladesh.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This action research demonstrates that drama-based pedagogy (DBP) can be successfully implemented in rural secondary schools in Bangladesh when accompanied by sustained professional development, collaborative support, and structured reflective practice. The study showed that integrating drama into classroom instruction not only fosters deeper conceptual understanding but also enhances student engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking. By repositioning students as active participants in their learning, DBP encourages learner agency and supports the development of socio-emotional and cognitive skills simultaneously (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Boal, 2002).

Teachers' experiences indicate that professional development—particularly opportunities for reflective practice and peer collaboration—is essential for the effective adoption of innovative pedagogies. Participants reported increased confidence in implementing drama strategies, shifts toward facilitative teaching, and heightened professional satisfaction. These findings reinforce the importance of sustained, practice-based teacher learning models in translating pedagogical reforms into classroom realities, especially in resource-constrained contexts (McNiff, 2013; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998).

The research also highlights the potential of DBP to address persistent challenges in rural education, including limited student engagement, rote learning, and low participation. By fostering active learning, collaborative inquiry, and expressive learning opportunities, drama-based strategies can contribute to more inclusive and participatory classroom environments (Anderson & Jennings, 2018; O'Toole, 2006). Although challenges related to time constraints, large class sizes, and examination-oriented assessment systems were identified, iterative cycles of action and reflection enabled teachers to adapt and refine their practices, demonstrating the viability of DBP within existing constraints.

Implications for policy and curriculum reform

This study has important implications that extend beyond classroom practice and into education policy, curriculum design, and teacher development systems in Bangladesh.

First, there is a clear need to systematically integrate learner-centred and participatory pedagogies—such as drama-based approaches—into national curriculum frameworks. The current curriculum, while supportive of active learning in principle, remains largely oriented toward content coverage and examination performance. To realise the potential of pedagogical innovations like DBP, curriculum guidelines should:

- Explicitly include participatory and experiential learning strategies
- Provide examples of drama-based and creative pedagogies aligned with learning outcomes
- Encourage multimodal forms of student expression beyond written recall

Second, assessment reform is critical. The findings suggest that while DBP supports deeper learning, its impact is constrained by assessment systems that prioritise memorisation. To align assessment with pedagogical innovation, policymakers should:

- Incorporate performance-based and formative assessment approaches
- Recognise collaboration, communication, and critical thinking as assessable competencies
- Introducing flexible assessment models that capture learning through demonstration, dialogue, and application

Third, teacher education and professional development systems require restructuring. Pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes should:

- Include mandatory training on learner-centred pedagogies, including drama-based methods
- Emphasise experiential learning, reflective practice, and classroom experimentation
- Strengthen teachers' capacity to design and facilitate participatory lessons within large and resource-constrained classrooms
- Promote ongoing professional learning communities rather than one-off training sessions

Fourth, school leadership and system-level support must be strengthened to enable pedagogical change. This includes:

- Encouraging school leaders to support innovation and classroom experimentation
- Aligning inspection and evaluation systems with learner-centred teaching practices
- Providing teachers with time, space, and institutional backing to implement new approaches

Towards system-level transformation

From a broader systems perspective, this study suggests that DBP is not merely a classroom technique but a catalyst for rethinking teaching and learning processes in secondary education. However, its sustained impact depends on coherence across curriculum, assessment, teacher training, and institutional practices.

Without such alignment, there is a risk that innovative pedagogies remain isolated initiatives rather than becoming embedded within the education system. Therefore, scaling DBP requires a systemic reform approach, where policy, practice, and professional development are mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, drama-based pedagogy offers a promising and contextually adaptable approach to transforming secondary education in rural Bangladesh by promoting active learning, teacher innovation, and student engagement. However, its full potential can only be realised through aligned policy reforms, particularly in curriculum design, assessment systems, and teacher education.

When embedded within supportive institutional frameworks and sustained professional development programmes, DBP can contribute to meaningful improvements in both teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The study therefore calls for a shift from viewing pedagogical innovation as a classroom-level intervention to recognising it as a system-level reform priority.

By advancing both empirical evidence and policy-relevant insights, this research contributes to the growing body of work advocating for learner-centred, participatory pedagogies that integrate cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of learning to create more equitable and meaningful educational experiences (Dewey, 1938; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995).

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Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for educational research, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' identities. Written or verbal informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, and assent along with guardian consent was secured for participating students where necessary. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. As the study involved minimal risk classroom-based educational interventions, no formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required under the applicable institutional guidelines at the time of the research.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Author contributions

As a single-author study, the author was responsible for the conceptualisation, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript drafting, revision, and final approval of the manuscript.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Certain data are not publicly available in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants.

AI disclosure

Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited capacity to support language refinement, grammar checking, editorial assistance, and the creation of a pictorial diagram illustrating the study's conceptual framework during manuscript preparation. All substantive intellectual content, research design, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final writing decisions were carried out solely by the author.

Biographical sketch

Musbarraf Hossain Tansen is an education practitioner, researcher, and development professional based in Bangladesh with over two decades of experience in education, governance, and social development. He is currently a PhD researcher at the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. His academic and professional interests include drama-based pedagogy, teacher professional development, critical pedagogy, education reform, and inclusive learning systems. He has worked with national and international organisations on policy, programme leadership, and systems strengthening initiatives.

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