



International Journal of Early Childhood, Special and Inclusive Education

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026 |
<https://www.azalpub.com/index.php/IJECISIE>

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article Info

Received:02/5/2026
Accepted:4-/25/2026
Published:6/18/2026

Play-Based Learning in Early Childhood Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Kindergarten Pedagogical Practices at Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main

Beverly Joy S. Manzano
Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main
beverlyjoy.manzano@deped.gov.ph

Abstract

Play-based learning has become a fundamental pedagogical approach in early childhood education due to its capacity to enhance holistic learner development. This qualitative case study explored the pedagogical practices of kindergarten teachers implementing play-based learning at Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main. Specifically, the study examined instructional strategies, classroom experiences, learner engagement, and challenges encountered in implementing play-centered instruction. Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting kindergarten teachers as participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the data. Findings revealed that play-based learning promoted active participation, social interaction, creativity, language development, and experiential learning among kindergarten learners. Teachers commonly utilized role-playing, manipulative games, storytelling, music-and-movement activities, and collaborative play experiences to facilitate learning. The study further revealed that play-based instruction enhanced learners' confidence, communication skills, and classroom motivation. However, participants identified challenges related to limited instructional materials, classroom management difficulties, time constraints, and inadequate parental understanding of play-oriented instruction. The findings emphasize the significance of developmentally appropriate pedagogies in fostering meaningful learning experiences in early childhood education. The study recommends strengthened institutional support, continuous teacher training, and enhanced provision of contextualized play materials to improve the implementation of play-based learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Keywords: play-based learning, early childhood education, kindergarten pedagogy, learner engagement, qualitative case study, Philippines

Introduction

Early childhood education plays a vital role in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Within kindergarten education, play-based learning has emerged as an essential pedagogical approach that supports holistic learner growth through meaningful and experiential activities. Play allows young learners to explore their environment, develop problem-solving skills, strengthen communication abilities, and construct knowledge through active engagement. Contemporary educational frameworks emphasize that children learn more effectively when instruction is interactive, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate.

In the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education advocates child-centered and play-oriented instruction within the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework. Play-based learning promotes learner participation, curiosity, creativity, and collaboration while supporting foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Through guided and free play activities, learners develop social competence, self-regulation, imagination, and critical thinking abilities essential for lifelong learning.

Despite the recognized importance of play-based learning, many kindergarten teachers encounter challenges in implementing play-oriented pedagogies. Limited instructional resources, large class sizes, curriculum demands, and varying parental expectations often influence instructional delivery. Furthermore, teachers' lived experiences in facilitating play-centered instruction remain underexplored in local educational research contexts.

This study investigated the pedagogical practices of kindergarten teachers in implementing play-based learning at Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main. By examining teachers' instructional experiences, classroom strategies, learner engagement practices, and implementation challenges, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education.

Literature Review

Play-based learning is grounded in constructivist perspectives which emphasize that children actively construct knowledge through interaction, exploration, and social engagement. According to Lev Vygotsky, learning occurs through social mediation and collaborative experiences where children develop higher-order thinking skills through guided participation. Similarly, Piaget emphasized that play enhances cognitive development by enabling children to explore concepts through concrete experiences.

Research indicates that play-based pedagogies significantly improve learner engagement, creativity, communication skills, and social interaction in early childhood settings. Doris Bergen emphasized that imaginative play contributes to language acquisition, emotional development, and problem-solving abilities among young learners. Likewise, Pyle and Danniels (2017) explained that play-centered classrooms support both academic and socio-emotional learning outcomes. Studies further reveal that guided play enhances literacy and numeracy readiness among kindergarten learners. Through manipulative games, storytelling, role-play, and collaborative tasks, learners strengthen vocabulary development, comprehension, and mathematical reasoning skills. Play-based environments also foster learner autonomy, confidence, and positive attitudes toward school participation.

However, implementing play-based instruction presents several challenges for teachers. Existing studies identify issues related to insufficient classroom resources, time limitations, assessment demands, and misconceptions regarding the educational value of play. In some contexts, parents and stakeholders perceive play as less academically rigorous compared to traditional instructional approaches. Consequently, teachers must balance curriculum requirements with developmentally appropriate practices.

The present study contributes to the literature by exploring the lived pedagogical experiences of kindergarten teachers implementing play-based learning within a Philippine public elementary school setting.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study research design to explore the pedagogical practices and lived instructional experiences of kindergarten teachers implementing play-based learning at Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives, classroom experiences, and contextual realities.

Participants of the Study

Participants included kindergarten teachers from Bagong Sikat Elementary School–Main who were directly involved in implementing play-based instructional practices. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants with relevant teaching experiences in early childhood education.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interview questions focused on instructional strategies, learner participation, classroom management, challenges, and perceptions regarding play-based learning implementation.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Data coding, categorization, and

theme generation were conducted systematically to identify recurring patterns and significant pedagogical experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility was ensured through member checking and prolonged engagement with participants. Dependability was established through audit trails, while confirmability was strengthened through data triangulation. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context and participants.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Active Learner Engagement Through Play-Centered Activities

Participants consistently emphasized that play-based learning increased learner participation and classroom engagement. Teachers observed that learners became more enthusiastic and actively involved during play-oriented instructional activities.

One participant shared:

“Mas active ang mga bata kapag may games, role play, at storytelling activities.”

Another participant explained:

“Kapag naglalaro sila habang natututo, mas mabilis nilang naiintindihan ang lesson.”

Teachers noted that learners demonstrated improved attention, motivation, and participation during collaborative and hands-on learning experiences. These findings support the study of Pyle and Danniels (2017), which revealed that play-based learning environments significantly enhance learner engagement and participation in early childhood classrooms. The findings further align with constructivist perspectives emphasizing experiential and learner-centered instruction. Through active play, learners construct understanding while interacting with peers, materials, and their environment.

Theme 2: Development of Social and Communication Skills

Participants described play-based learning as an effective strategy for improving learners' communication abilities and social interaction skills. Teachers observed that collaborative play encouraged children to express ideas, negotiate roles, and interact positively with classmates.

One teacher stated:

“Natututo silang makipag-usap at makisama habang naglalaro.”

Another participant remarked:

“Mas nagiging confident silang magsalita during group activities.”

Teachers emphasized that role-playing, group games, and storytelling activities enhanced learners' oral language development and confidence. These findings corroborate Bergen (2015), who emphasized that imaginative play strengthens communication competence and socio-emotional development among young learners.

The study further suggests that play-centered classrooms foster emotional security and positive peer relationships, which are essential components of early childhood learning environments.

Theme 3: Experiential Learning and Creativity Enhancement

Participants highlighted that play-based activities encouraged creativity, imagination, and experiential learning among kindergarten learners. Teachers explained that learners developed problem-solving abilities and creativity through manipulative games, drawing activities, pretend play, and exploratory tasks.

One participant shared:

“Mas creative sila kapag may activities na sila mismo ang gumagawa.”

Another teacher explained:

“Napapalawak ang imagination nila through pretend play and storytelling.”

Teachers observed that experiential learning enabled learners to connect classroom lessons with real-life experiences. These findings align with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes learning through direct participation and reflection.

The results indicate that play-based pedagogies support holistic learner development by integrating cognitive, emotional, social, and creative dimensions of learning.

Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing Play-Based Learning

Despite the positive outcomes, participants identified several challenges affecting the implementation of play-based instruction. Teachers emphasized limited instructional materials, insufficient classroom space, time constraints, and classroom management concerns.

One participant remarked:

“Kulang minsan ang materials para sa play activities.”

Another teacher stated:

“Mahirap i-manage kapag maraming bata during active play.”

Participants further explained that some parents misunderstood play-based learning and questioned its academic value. Teachers emphasized the need to educate parents regarding the developmental importance of play in early childhood

education.

These findings support previous studies indicating that resource limitations and stakeholder misconceptions remain significant barriers to effective play-based instruction in public schools.

Conclusion

The study revealed that play-based learning serves as an effective pedagogical approach in kindergarten education by enhancing learner engagement, creativity, communication skills, and experiential learning. Teachers utilized diverse play-oriented instructional strategies that promoted active participation and meaningful classroom interaction among learners. The findings further demonstrated that play-centered instruction contributes significantly to the holistic development of young children.

However, challenges related to limited resources, classroom management, time constraints, and parental misconceptions continue to affect implementation. Despite these challenges, teachers remained committed to creating developmentally appropriate and engaging learning environments for kindergarten learners.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of strengthening play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood education to support inclusive, interactive, and learner-centered instruction.

Implications of the Study

The findings provide significant implications for early childhood education practitioners, school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Schools may strengthen institutional support for play-based instruction through the provision of contextualized learning materials and developmentally appropriate classroom environments. Teacher training programs may further enhance educators' competencies in facilitating play-centered learning experiences and classroom management strategies.

The study also highlights the importance of parent orientation programs to strengthen stakeholder understanding of the educational value of play in early childhood learning. Furthermore, policymakers may reinforce support for developmentally appropriate pedagogies within kindergarten education programs to improve learner engagement and holistic development outcomes.

References

- Andres, A. (2019). Achievement Goals and Mathematics Achievement of the Senior High School Students. *International Journal of English and Education*, 8 (2).
- Andres, A. (2023). Establishing Quality Instrument for the Summative Assessment of Pre-Service Elementary Teachers. *JETT*. 14 (3), 9-16).
- Andres, A.D. (2022). Metacognition and Performance in Mathematical Problem-Solving Among Bachelor of Elementary (BEED) Pre-service Teachers. *Central European Management Journal*, 30 (4). 86-95.
- Antonio, A. (2021). Syntactical Scrutiny: Inaccuracies in the Lesson Planning of Non- Language Pre Service Teachers. *International Journal of Arts, Sciences and Education*,
- Balog, P., & Gonzales, E. (2021). From Linguistic Landscapes to Teaching Resources: A Case of Some Rural Areas in the Province of Quezon. *International Journal of Arts, Sciences and Education*, 1(2), 23–44.
- Banares, A. J. (2022). Reinterpreting Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare through Stylistic Analysis. *International Journal of Arts, Sciences and Education*, 3(July Special Issue), 189–204. <https://ijase.org/index.php/ijase/article/view/163>.
- Bergen, D. (2015). The role of pretend play in children's cognitive development. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 17(1), 1–13.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2017). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 28(3), 274–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2016). Guided play: Principles and practices. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25(3), 177–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721416645512>
- Wood, E. (2014). Free choice and free play in early childhood education: Troubling the discourse. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2013.830562>