



PLAY-BASED LEARNING AND LITERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: PRACTICES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

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Abstract.

This study examined the relationship between play-based learning and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners in the West 1 and 2 Districts, Mandaue City Division, for the School Year 2025–2026. Grounded in Sociocultural Theory and the Emergent Literacy perspective, the study aimed to determine how play-based instructional practices influence learners' literacy performance and to propose an instructional enhancement plan. A quantitative, non-experimental descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The participants consisted of 33 kindergarten teachers selected through total enumeration. Data on play-based instruction were gathered using an adapted questionnaire, while learners' literacy performance was obtained from the Kindergarten Progress Report Card anchored on the ECCD Checklist. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that play-based instruction is highly utilized across all dimensions, including child-centered play environment, teacher facilitation, play-based literacy engagement, and active participation. Teachers commonly used structured activities such as songs, chants, and phonics games, while interactive strategies like dramatization and role-playing were less frequently implemented. Learners' literacy performance showed significant improvement, progressing from Developing in the third quarter to Approaching Proficiency in the fourth quarter. Furthermore, correlation analysis indicated that child-centered play environments and play-based literacy engagement have significant relationships with literacy performance, while teacher facilitation and active participation showed no significant direct relationship. The study concludes that play-based instruction, when designed to be child-centered and literacy-focused, significantly contributes to the development of early literacy skills. It highlights the importance of intentional and well-structured play activities in improving learners' literacy outcomes. Based on the findings, a Play-Based Instructional Enhancement Plan was proposed to strengthen classroom practices and support continuous literacy development.

Keywords: *play-based learning, literacy skills development, kindergarten learners, child-centered instruction, early literacy*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays an important role in developing learners' foundational literacy skills, especially during the kindergarten stage when children begin building language, reading readiness, and communication abilities. Play-based learning has emerged as an effective instructional approach that supports holistic development through exploration, creativity, and meaningful interaction. In early childhood education, play is no longer viewed merely as recreation but as a structured teaching strategy that promotes cognitive, language, and social development. Research shows that children who participate in guided play demonstrate improved attention, motivation, and classroom participation. Through hands-on experiences and social collaboration, learners are able to construct meaning in ways that make literacy learning more engaging and developmentally appropriate. Studies



further emphasize that play not only strengthens academic readiness but also supports children's emotional and social growth, which contributes to overall learning success (Sitorus et al., 2024).

Recent international and local studies highlight the importance of integrating play-based instruction in kindergarten classrooms. Research shows that literacy-focused play activities improve children's phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and early reading skills while increasing language proficiency and learning engagement (Afiyani & Ahmad, 2024; Penapaud Research, 2023). In the Philippine context, studies among kindergarten learners found that play-based and game-based learning enhance literacy performance and reading readiness (Decenilla & Quirap, 2023; Lojero, 2025). Moreover, research aligned with the MATATAG curriculum confirms that play-based learning improves learners' cognitive and academic outcomes (Celedonio, 2025). These findings indicate that play-based learning is an effective approach for strengthening literacy development and classroom engagement.

Despite strong evidence supporting play-based learning, challenges remain at the local level. In the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Mandaue City Division, results from the District Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment (DMEA) for the first quarter of School Year 2025–2026 showed concerns in kindergarten learners' literacy performance. Progress report card data revealed that about 45% of learners were at the Beginning level and 30% at the Developing level, indicating that many have not yet achieved the expected literacy competencies. These results suggest gaps in instructional practices, particularly in the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate strategies such as play-based instruction. Although the MATATAG curriculum promotes learner-centered approaches, classroom practices may still vary due to limited training, resources, or guidance in integrating purposeful play into literacy instruction.

Addressing this gap requires targeted interventions that strengthen teachers' pedagogical skills through professional development in play-based learning strategies, literacy integration, and authentic assessment. Training that emphasizes guided play, structured literacy activities, and collaborative learning can help teachers create more engaging classrooms and improve learners' literacy skills. Integrating play-based learning into daily lesson planning and classroom management may also enhance learner performance. In response to these concerns, this study examines the effects of play-based learning on the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners in West 2 District, Mandaue City Division. It specifically investigates how play-based instructional strategies influence learner engagement and literacy performance among those classified under the Beginning and Developing levels. The findings aim to provide evidence that will guide teachers, school leaders, and education stakeholders in improving instructional practices aligned with the MATATAG curriculum while addressing existing literacy performance gaps.

This study contributes to the improvement of early childhood education by examining how play-based learning influences the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners. The findings may guide teachers and school leaders in designing developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that strengthen learner engagement and literacy outcomes. It may also help parents and the school community better understand the value of play as a meaningful process that supports children's language and literacy development. Ultimately, the study provides evidence that may support the enhancement of early literacy programs and instructional practices aligned with the goals of the MATATAG curriculum.

Research Questions

This study aims to determine the relationship between the play-based learning instruction and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners in West 1 and 2 Districts, Mandaue City Division for the School Year 2025–2026, basis for literacy play-based instructional enhancement plan.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do kindergarten teachers utilize play-based learning instruction in the classroom, particularly in terms of:
 - 1.1 Child-Centered Play;



- 1.2 Teacher Facilitation During;
 - 1.3 Play-Based Literacy, and
 - 1.4 Active Participation Through Play?
2. What play-based learning activities are preferred in developing the literacy skills of the kindergarten learners and the reasons for using them?
 3. What is the level of literacy skills of kindergarten learners based on the Kindergarten Progress Report Card and ECCD during the assessment periods?
 4. Is there a significant correlation between the play-based learning implementation in the classroom and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners?
 5. Based on the findings of the study, what literacy play-based instructional enhancement plan may be proposed?

Statement of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant correlation between the play-based learning implementation in the classroom and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners.

Review of Related Literature

This section presents related literature and studies supporting the research on play-based learning and its influence on the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners. It focuses on studies published within the last five years to reflect current practices in early childhood education. The literature highlights how play-based strategies such as guided play, hands-on exploration, and interactive activities support the development of foundational literacy skills, including listening, speaking, reading readiness, and writing readiness.

Guided play is widely recognized as an effective instructional strategy in early childhood education because it combines child-led exploration with purposeful teacher facilitation. According to Jennifer M. Zosh and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek (2022), guided play allows teachers to scaffold children's learning while maintaining the natural curiosity and engagement associated with play. Through guided play experiences such as storytelling, dramatic play, and collaborative games, children participate in meaningful language interactions that support vocabulary development and comprehension. These learning experiences strengthen communication skills and encourage children to participate actively in literacy-related activities.

Hands-on literacy exploration refers to experiential learning activities where children interact directly with materials to understand language concepts. Neumann (2023) found that young learners who engage with physical literacy materials demonstrate higher levels of symbol recognition and early writing behaviors than those exposed only to teacher-directed instruction. Similarly, Pyle and Danniels (2021) explained that tactile learning experiences help children connect sounds, symbols, and meaning through active participation. These experiences support print awareness and help children develop early writing readiness skills.

Listening and viewing skills are foundational components of early literacy development because they help children understand spoken language and interpret visual information. According to Rowe and Snow (2021), young learners develop comprehension abilities through exposure to spoken language, storytelling, and visual learning experiences. Mol and Bus (2022) found that children who actively listen to stories and observe visual presentations demonstrate stronger language processing skills and improved readiness for reading. These experiences support children in following instructions, interpreting visual cues, and participating effectively in literacy-related classroom activities.

Play-based learning has gained strong support as an effective instructional approach in early childhood education because it promotes cognitive, social, and language development. Parker and Thomsen (2022) reported that play-



based learning encourages exploration, creativity, and interaction, which enhance children's language acquisition and engagement in learning. Similarly, Leggett and Ford (2023) found that integrating play into literacy instruction improves learner participation and strengthens early language development.

In the Philippine setting Santos and Rivera (2024) reported that play-based classroom activities significantly improved vocabulary development and communication skills among kindergarten learners. Their study emphasized that play-based strategies provide meaningful opportunities for learners to explore language and participate actively in literacy-related tasks.

Expressive language skills refer to children's ability to communicate ideas and participate in conversations. Play-based learning environments encourage children to share ideas through storytelling, role-playing, and collaborative dialogue. Wasik and Hindman (2022) found that these experiences strengthen children's expressive vocabulary and narrative skills. Similarly, McLeod and Harrison (2023) noted that children's expressive language improves when they participate in interactive classroom activities involving discussion and shared storytelling.

In the Philippine context, Cruz and Garcia (2021) found that integrating drawing and tracing activities into kindergarten lessons improved learners' fine motor coordination and writing readiness. Their findings highlight the importance of incorporating developmentally appropriate writing experiences into early childhood instruction.

Additionally, recent studies further supported the effectiveness of play-based learning in strengthening early literacy development among young learners. According to Nicolopoulou (2021), pretend play and storytelling activities enhance children's oral language, vocabulary acquisition, and narrative comprehension, which are essential foundations for reading readiness. Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2021) also noted that guided play promotes deeper conceptual understanding because children learn best when exploration is combined with intentional teacher support.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that play-based learning strategies—such as guided play, hands-on literacy exploration, and interactive learning activities—significantly support the development of early literacy skills. Both international and Philippine studies demonstrate that developmentally appropriate play experiences strengthen listening, speaking, reading readiness, and writing readiness skills among kindergarten learners. However, limited research has examined how these strategies influence literacy development within specific local contexts such as the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Mandaue City Division. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the role of play-based learning in improving literacy skills among kindergarten learners in this setting.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental research design using the descriptive correlational method. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the study examines measurable variables related to play-based learning instruction and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners using indicators from the ECCD Checklist and the Kindergarten Progress Report Card. The descriptive component present the current practices of kindergarten teachers in implementing play-based learning and describe the level of learners' literacy skills across listening and viewing, speaking or expressive language, reading or receptive language, and writing readiness.

Meanwhile, the correlational aspect determined the degree and direction of the relationship between play-based learning instruction and learners' literacy competencies. This design is appropriate because the study does not involve experimental manipulation or intervention; rather, it analyzes naturally occurring classroom practices and existing learner performance data. In this study, play-based learning instruction serves as the independent variable, while literacy skills development serves as the dependent variable.



This design is selected because the study does not involve any intervention or experimental manipulation; instead, it focuses on describing current classroom practices and analyzing naturally occurring data. Play-based learning is treated as the independent variable, while literacy skills development—specifically listening and viewing skills, speaking or expressive language skills, reading or receptive language skills, and writing readiness skills—serves as the dependent variable.

Environment

The study was conducted in the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Mandaue City Division, Department of Education, which is composed of the following public elementary schools: Bakilid Elementary School, Cabancalan 1 Elementary School, Maguikay Elementary School, Tabok 1 Elementary School, Tabok II Elementary School, Tingub Elementary School, Canduman Elementary School, Don Calixto C. Yongco Sr. Elementary School, Mandaue City School for the Arts, Casili Elementary School, Cubacub Elementary School and Pagsabungan Elementary School. These schools implement kindergarten programs aligned with the K to 12 Basic Education Program and follow developmentally appropriate practices guided by the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) system and the National Early Learning Framework (NELF). The schools represent diverse classroom environments where learners engage in language-rich and play-centered experiences, making them suitable contexts for examining the relationship between play-based learning and literacy skills development..

Participants and Sample Size

The participants of this study will consist of 33 kindergarten teachers assigned in the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Mandaue City Division.. The study will utilize total enumeration, as all eligible kindergarten teachers in the district will be invited to participate. This approach ensures that the data represent the actual implementation of play-based learning instruction across the entire West 1 and 2 Districts.

The participants (1) currently employed as a kindergarten teacher in any of the identified schools in West 2 District, (2) actively teaching kindergarten learners during the conduct of the study, and (3) willing to voluntarily participate. Teachers who are not assigned to kindergarten classes or who are on leave during the data collection period will be excluded from the study.

Instrument

To address the research problems, this study will utilize standardized instruments that gather both perceptual and performance-based data related to play-based learning instruction and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners. The instruments are based on the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist and the Kindergarten Progress Report Card, which are officially mandated DepEd assessment tools used to monitor learners' developmental progress through authentic classroom observation and continuous assessment.

To determine the extent of play-based learning instruction, the Play-Based Learning Instruction Questionnaire and Standardized Scale was used. The instrument was used from research-based frameworks on guided play and developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education (Pyle & Danniels, 2021; Weisberg et al., 2021; Leggett & Ford, 2023). A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always) will measure teachers' implementation of play-based learning strategies. Although the questionnaire is derived from validated frameworks and treated as a standardized measure, it will still undergo reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha to determine its internal consistency in the context of this study.

Literacy skills development will be measured using the Kindergarten Progress Report Card, anchored on the ECCD Checklist and aligned with the Language, Literacy, and Communication Domain, including listening and viewing, speaking or expressive language, reading or receptive language, and writing readiness skills. Learners' competencies are translated into developmental descriptors: Advanced (90–100), Proficient (85–89), Approaching Proficiency (80–84), Developing (75–79), and Beginning (below 75). Quarterly literacy ratings will be used, and the class mean per teacher will represent learners' literacy performance.



Since the ECCD Checklist and the Kindergarten Progress Report Card are nationally mandated DepEd assessment tools, their validity and reliability are institutionally established. Using these standardized instruments alongside an adapted questionnaire ensures a quantitative, developmentally appropriate, and policy-aligned approach to examining the relationship between play-based learning instruction and literacy development among kindergarten learners.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process will be conducted in three phases: pre-data collection, actual data collection, and post-data processing.

Pre-Data Gathering. Prior to data collection, approval will be secured from the University of the Visayas Graduate School, the Research Ethics Committee (REC), and the Schools Division Superintendent of Mandaue City. Coordination will then be made with the school heads of the 12 schools. An orientation will be conducted with all kindergarten teacher participants to explain the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their rights as voluntary participants. Informed consent forms will be distributed and collected before the administration of any research instruments.

Actual Data Gathering. The actual data collection will be conducted by the researcher through an online platform. The Play-Based Learning Instruction Questionnaire (Adapted Standardized Scale) will be administered to all kindergarten teachers in West 21 and 2 Districts using Google Forms. The questionnaire link will be sent through official email or secured messaging platforms, accompanied by clear instructions regarding participation, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement. Participants will be given approximately 20–30 minutes to complete the questionnaire at their convenience without disrupting regular class instruction. The researcher will remain available online to provide clarifications while ensuring independent responses.

Data on learners' literacy skills development will be obtained from the Kindergarten Progress Report Card, which is anchored on the ECCD Checklist. Only consolidated class literacy ratings under the Language, Literacy and Communication Domain will be collected. No individual learner identities will be gathered or recorded; only aggregated literacy data will be used to ensure that no child-level identifiable information is included, thereby strengthening ethical compliance and data confidentiality.

Post-Data Gathering. After all responses are collected, the researcher will download, encode, and organize the data for statistical analysis. All information will be stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained, and all digital records will be deleted upon publication of the study in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study will be analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods with the aid of JAMOV, an open-source statistical software suitable for social science research. The platform is selected due to its accessibility, reliability, and user-friendly interface, allowing efficient analysis of quantitative data without the need for commercial licensing.

To examine the relationship between play-based learning instruction and literacy skills development among kindergarten learners, the chi-square was utilized. This test will determine the strength and direction of the relationship between play-based learning instruction and learners' literacy performance, particularly in listening and viewing skills, speaking or expressive language skills, reading or receptive language skills, and writing readiness skills based on ECCD and Kindergarten Progress Report Card indicators.

Together, these analytical tools will enable the researcher to identify patterns in the implementation of play-based learning instruction and examine the extent to which it is related to the literacy skills development of kindergarten



learners. This statistical approach ensures that the findings are evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and meaningful within the context of early childhood education and ECCD-aligned assessment practices

Ethical Consideration

This study observes ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report—beneficence, respect, and justice—to ensure that all participants are protected throughout the research process. Ethical approval will be secured from the University of the Visayas Institutional Review Board.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented and discussed the data gathered in the study to determine the relationship between play-based learning instruction and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners in the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Department of Education Mandaue City Division for School Year 2025–2026. The findings were arranged according to the research questions and were interpreted in relation to early childhood education practices and literacy development among young learners. This chapter also explained how play-based learning supported the development of listening and viewing, speaking or expressive language, reading or receptive language, and writing readiness skills of kindergarten learners. Furthermore, the results of the study served as the foundation for the proposed JOJE Play-Based Instructional Enhancement Plan aimed at strengthening literacy learning through meaningful, engaging, and child-centered play experiences.

Demographic Profile of the Teachers

The demographic profile of the kindergarten teacher-participants from the West 1 and 2 Districts of the Department of Education Mandaue City Division included their age, gender, educational attainment, and years of teaching experience. This information provided important background in understanding the implementation of play-based learning instruction and its relationship to the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners. Since teachers' professional experiences and educational backgrounds may influence the strategies and approaches used in play-based instruction, the profile data served as a basis for interpreting the findings of the study more accurately. Moreover, understanding the profile of the participants helped identify the overall characteristics of the teaching workforce involved in early childhood education within the study area.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Teachers

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-29 years old	10	30.3
	30-39 years old	13	39.4
	40-49 years old	1	3.0
	50 and above	2	6.1
Gender	Male	1	3.0
	Female	32	97.0
Education	Bachelors' Degree	4	12.1
	BS with Masters Units	18	54.5
	Masters' Degree	11	33.3
	MA with Doctoral Units	0	0.0
	Doctorate Degree.	0	0.0
Experience in Teaching	1-5 years	15	45.5
	6-10 years	6	18.2
	11-15 years	11	33.3
	16-20 years	1	3.0



21 years and above

0

0.0

The demographic profile of the teachers revealed several notable extremes across variables. In terms of age, the largest proportion belonged to the 30–39 years old group (39.4%), indicating that most teachers were in their early to mid-career stage. In contrast, the lowest representation was among those aged 50 and above (6.1%), suggesting a relatively small number of senior or nearing-retirement teachers.

For gender, there was a clear imbalance, with female teachers comprising an overwhelming majority (97.0%), while male teachers represented only 3.0%, indicating a highly female-dominated teaching workforce. Regarding educational attainment, the highest proportion of teachers were those with Bachelor's degrees with Master's units (54.5%), reflecting ongoing professional development. On the other hand, no teachers had doctoral units or a doctorate degree (0.0%), highlighting a gap in advanced academic qualifications. In terms of teaching experience, the majority of teachers had 1–5 years of experience (45.5%), indicating a relatively young or less experienced workforce.

Conversely, no teachers had 21 years or more of experience (0.0%), suggesting limited long-term teaching tenure within the group. Overall, the findings suggested that the kindergarten teachers were predominantly young to mid-career, highly female-dominated, engaged in graduate-level education but lacking doctoral qualifications, and relatively early in their teaching careers.

Play-Based instructional activities Utilized by teachers

This section presented the play-based instructional activities utilized by kindergarten teachers during the assessment period. The activities reflected the different classroom strategies and approaches used by teachers to support literacy and language development among kindergarten learners through play-based instruction.

Table 2

Play-Based instructional activities Utilized by teachers

Utilized Play-based Activities	Frequency	Percentage
□ Singing songs, chants, and rhymes that emphasize sounds and words	28	84.8
□ Alphabet and phonics games (letter–sound matching, alphabet puzzles)	28	84.8
□ Storytelling and story reenactment through dramatic or pretend play	18	54.5
□ Interactive group games that involve listening and following directions	16	48.5
□ Drawing, labeling, and early writing activities during play centers	12	36.4
□ Role-playing or pretend play that encourages verbal interaction	11	33.3
□ Picture reading and story discussion in the reading corner	10	30.3
□ Puppet play or story dramatization to develop speaking skills	6	18.2
□ Word or vocabulary games (e.g., word cards, guessing games)	6	18.2

The most used activities are singing songs, chants, and rhymes and alphabet and phonics games, both with the highest frequency (84.8%). This indicates that teachers strongly emphasize sound awareness, phonics, and repetition-based strategies to support early literacy development.

In contrast, the least utilized activities include puppet play or story dramatization (18.2%), picture reading and story discussion (30.3%), and role-playing or pretend play (33.3%). These activities, which typically promote oral language, creativity, and expressive communication, are used less frequently.



Overall, the findings suggest that teachers tend to prioritize structured and skill-based literacy activities (e.g., phonics and songs), while interactive and expressive play strategies (e.g., dramatization and role-play) are less commonly implemented.

Reasons for Selecting the Play-Based Activities

The following reasons present the perspectives of kindergarten teachers on their choices in selecting play-based activities to support literacy skills development. These responses highlight the practical reasons behind their instructional decisions, showing how teachers intentionally choose activities that are engaging, developmentally appropriate, and effective in enhancing young learners' literacy skills.

A. Play/Games makes learning enjoyable

The following statements reflect the reasons of kindergarten teachers for selecting play-based activities, highlighting how enjoyment plays a vital role in engaging young learners and supporting literacy development.

"I chose these activities because they are enjoyable and suitable for kindergarten learners."
(Teacher A, lines 1–2)

"Play-based learning makes learning fun and meaningful while developing creativity, social skills, and problem-solving abilities. These activities are engaging and appropriate for my learners."
(Teacher B, lines 3–6)

"I chose these activities because they make learning fun, engaging, and effective. Learners are more interested and actively participate." (Teacher C, lines 7–9)

"I use storytelling, dramatic play, phonics games, and songs with rhymes because I've seen how they naturally engage children and make learning enjoyable." (Teacher D, lines 10–12)

"Children learn best when they are happy and involved in the activities." (Teacher E, lines 13–14)

"Play-based activities are more effective than rote instruction at this age. They help develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and a love for learning. Since learners have a short attention span, they need enjoyable activities." (Teacher F, lines 15–18)

"I use play-based activities to support literacy development because learners enjoy while they learn. They easily understand through interactive activities, and they become more participative when they are engaged." (Teacher G, lines 19–22)

These responses showed that teachers intentionally selected play-based activities because these created a positive and engaging learning environment. Enjoyment was viewed not only as a motivating factor but also as an important element in helping learners participate actively and develop essential literacy skills.

B. Play-based activities help build social skills, self-confidence and a sense of independence

This theme presented the reasons of kindergarten teachers for selecting play-based activities, emphasizing how these strategies supported learners' social interaction, confidence, and independence in the learning process.

"I believe students learn best when they are involved. Play-based learning matches how young children naturally learn—through curiosity, exploration, and social interaction." (Teacher H, lines 1–3)

"In my experience, storytelling helps children express themselves and understand language in a meaningful way, while phonics games strengthen their letter-sound recognition through fun activities."
(Teacher I, lines 4–7)

"I chose these activities because they build learners' self-confidence and sense of independence while developing their language and early writing skills in an engaging way." (Teacher J, lines 8–10)

"Play-based activities help me provide quality education and meet the diverse needs of my learners. They support emotional development, allowing children to express their feelings, handle frustration, and build confidence." (Teacher K, lines 11–14)

"These activities also stimulate critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, while encouraging imagination among learners." (Teacher L, lines 15–16)



"Play-based learning builds creativity, social skills, and problem-solving abilities. It helps learners communicate and express their ideas more confidently." (Teacher M, lines 17–18)

The findings showed that teachers intentionally selected play-based activities to support not only academic learning but also the social and emotional development of learners. These activities helped children build confidence, express themselves, and interact meaningfully with others. Through play, learners gradually developed independence and essential life skills, making learning more holistic and responsive to their developmental needs.

Children easily understand the lesson

This theme presents the reasons of kindergarten teachers for selecting play-based activities, emphasizing how these strategies help learners better understand lessons and develop foundational literacy skills.

"Singing songs and rhymes support memory and pronunciation, making it easier for children to remember words. I notice that when I use these activities, children participate more and gain confidence in using language." (Teacher N, lines 1–4)

"These approaches help me create a lively and supportive learning environment where literacy develops through play. Learners become more active and engaged, making learning more effective and enjoyable." (Teacher O, lines 5–7)

"I chose these activities because they cover important areas of early literacy. Phonics games help children connect letters and sounds, songs and rhymes develop listening skills, and play-based writing allows them to express ideas." (Teacher P, lines 8–11)

"These activities improve communication, listening, vocabulary, and early literacy skills through play." (Teacher Q, lines 12–13)

"I use these strategies so that learners can better understand the lesson and develop their oral communication skills." (Teacher R, lines 14–15)

"Singing songs and phonics games strengthen sound recognition, while drawing and early writing activities support creativity and basic literacy development." (Teacher S, lines 16–18)

"My pupils learn more when games are integrated into the lesson. Play-based activities help children learn naturally and develop problem-solving skills." (Teacher T, lines 19–21)

"I always use these activities because the materials are available and accessible in my classroom." (Teacher U, lines 22–23)

The findings showed that teachers selected play-based activities because these strategies made lessons easier to understand and more meaningful for learners. Play-based activities supported memory, participation, and comprehension, allowing children to develop literacy skills in a natural and enjoyable way. By integrating play into instruction, teachers created learning environments where children actively engaged, communicated, and gradually developed their understanding of language.

Extent of Utilization of Play-Based activities in the classroom

The following data present the extent of utilization of play-based instruction in kindergarten classrooms based on the teachers' classroom practices and literacy-related learning activities.

The findings revealed a very high extent of utilization of play-based instruction in kindergarten classrooms across the four indicators: child-centered play environment, teacher facilitation during play, play-based literacy engagement, and active participation through play. All indicators were described as "Always" and interpreted as "Well Utilized," with factor means ranging from 4.72 to 4.78.

Table 3

Utilization of Play-based Instruction in Kindergarten Classrooms

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
<i>Child-Centered Play Environment</i>			
I integrate play as a regular part of literacy learning activities.	4.69	0.585	Always



Learners are encouraged to explore language through play experiences.	4.66	0.645	Always
Play activities allow children to express ideas and imagination.	4.81	0.528	Always
I provide opportunities for learners to actively participate during play.	4.81	0.528	Always
The classroom environment supports child-initiated play during literacy tasks.	4.66	0.595	Always
Factor Mean	4.73	0.626	Well Utilized
<i>Teacher Facilitation During Play</i>			
I guide learners' communication while they are engaged in play.	4.73	0.574	Always
I ask open-ended questions that encourage children to talk during play.	4.73	0.626	Always
I support learners' storytelling or verbal expression during play activities.	4.76	0.561	Always
I observe and scaffold children's language development during play.	4.67	0.595	Always
I connect play experiences with literacy learning goals.	4.73	0.574	Always
Factor Mean	4.72	0.545	Well Utilized
<i>Play-Based Literacy Engagement</i>			
Play activities help learners practice listening and speaking skills.	4.82	0.528	Always
Children interact with printed materials during play experiences.	4.67	0.645	Always
Learners use language to communicate with peers while playing.	4.82	0.528	Always
Play encourages children to respond to stories or oral instructions.	4.88	0.415	Always
I use play to support early reading readiness.	4.70	0.529	Always
Factor Mean	4.78	0.460	Well Utilized
<i>Active Participation Through Play</i>			
Learners collaborate and communicate during play-based instruction.	4.73	0.517	Always
Play activities promote engagement in literacy learning.	4.79	0.485	Always
Children demonstrate confidence in expressing ideas during play.	4.64	0.653	Always
Play supports learners' participation in classroom discussions.	4.79	0.485	Always
Play-based learning creates meaningful opportunities for language exploration.	4.85	0.442	Always
Factor Mean	4.76	0.455	Well Utilized

Legend: 1.00-1.80=Never,/Not Utilized 1.81-2.60 Rarely/Less Utilized; 2.61-3.40=Sometimes/Moderately Utilized, 3.41-4.20=Often/Utilized; 4.21-5.00=Always/Well Utilized

For the child-centered play environment, the factor mean of 4.73 (SD = 0.626) indicated that teachers consistently integrated play into literacy activities and provided opportunities for exploration, creativity, and active participation. This suggested that the classrooms supported learner autonomy and experiential learning. In terms of teacher facilitation during play, the factor mean of 4.72 (SD = 0.545) showed that teachers actively guided learners through open-ended questioning, scaffolding communication, and linking play experiences to literacy objectives, emphasizing the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning.



For the child-centered play environment, the factor mean of 4.73 (SD = 0.626) indicated that teachers consistently integrated play into literacy activities and provided opportunities for exploration, creativity, and active participation. This suggested that the classrooms supported learner autonomy and experiential learning. In terms of teacher facilitation during play, the factor mean of 4.72 (SD = 0.545) showed that teachers actively guided learners through open-ended questioning, scaffolding communication, and linking play experiences to literacy objectives, emphasizing the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning.

The highest factor mean was observed in play-based literacy engagement (M = 4.78, SD = 0.460), indicating that play was effectively utilized to support literacy skills such as listening, speaking, and early reading readiness. Similarly, active participation through play obtained a factor mean of 4.76 (SD = 0.455), suggesting that learners were consistently engaged in collaborative and meaningful learning experiences. Overall, the findings demonstrated that play-based instruction was consistently and effectively implemented, supporting both literacy development and active learner participation in kindergarten classrooms. The consistently high ratings indicated that teachers successfully implemented play-based strategies within their literacy instruction. Among the indicators, play-based literacy engagement obtained the highest mean, suggesting that structured and intentional play activities positively influenced early literacy skills, particularly in speaking, listening, and reading readiness. Although teacher facilitation was also highly utilized, the findings implied that continuous enhancement of scaffolding techniques, questioning strategies, and intentional teaching during play remained important in improving learning outcomes. Moreover, the strong emphasis on child-centered play highlighted the importance of maintaining flexible, inclusive, and stimulating classroom environments that encouraged learner engagement and creativity.

These findings were supported by recent studies on play-based learning in early childhood education. UNESCO (2022) emphasized that play-based learning enhanced foundational literacy, social skills, and emotional development, particularly in early childhood settings, while structured play improved language acquisition and learner engagement. Similarly, UNICEF (2021) reported that children learned best through interactive and meaningful experiences that promoted communication and creativity. Furthermore, Jennifer M. Zosh et al. (2022) found that guided play significantly improved early literacy outcomes, especially when teachers actively scaffolded learning experiences.

Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Classes

The class performance of the 33 Kindergarten classes in Literacy Skills were obtained during the assessment period from the Kindergarten teachers. Table 2 revealed a great increase in the class performance.

Table 4

Class Performance in Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Learners

Levels	First Quarter		Fourth Quarter	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning (<i>Below 75</i>)	11	33.33	0	0.00
Developing (<i>75-79</i>)	3	9.09	2	6.06
Approaching Proficiency (<i>80-85</i>)	15	45.45	7	21.21
Proficient (<i>86-89</i>)	4	12.12	11	33.33
Advanced (<i>90-100</i>)	0	0.00	13	39.39
Mean Level	2.03		3.85	
Mean Score	77.85		84.88	
Description	Developing		Approaching Proficiency	

The findings presented the class performance in literacy skills of kindergarten learners during the third and fourth quarters, showing a notable improvement over time. During the first quarter, the majority of learners belonged to



the lower proficiency levels. Specifically, 33.33% of learners were classified under Beginning, indicating performance below the expected standard. The largest group (45.45%) fell under Approaching Proficiency, while only 12.12% reached the Proficient level and none achieved the Advanced level. The mean score of 77.85 was interpreted as Developing, suggesting that the learners' literacy skills were still emerging and required further support and intervention.

In contrast, the fourth quarter results demonstrated a significant improvement in learners' literacy performance. No learners remained in the Beginning level, while only 6.06% were categorized under Developing, indicating progress among struggling learners. The proportions of learners in the Proficient (33.33%) and Advanced (39.39%) levels increased considerably. Moreover, the mean score improved to 84.88, interpreted as Approaching Proficiency, reflecting overall improvement in literacy skills. These findings indicated that learners progressed from foundational literacy skills toward more developed literacy competencies between the two quarters.

The improvement in performance suggested that the teaching strategies, literacy interventions, and classroom activities implemented during the assessment period positively influenced learners' literacy development. The absence of learners in the Beginning category further indicated that the instructional approaches helped address the needs of low-performing learners and reduced learning gaps within the class. These findings supported the study of Jennifer M. Zosh et al. (2022), which found that guided play and intentional literacy activities improved early literacy outcomes, particularly in language development and learner engagement.

However, the findings contrasted with the study of Hanako Yoshikawa et al. (2021), which emphasized that improvements in literacy skills may vary depending on the consistency of instruction, learner readiness, and the availability of individualized support. This suggested that while play-based instruction was beneficial, not all learners progressed at the same pace.

Although improvement was evident, a small percentage of learners (6.06%) still remained in the Developing level, indicating the need for continuous targeted support and differentiated instruction. The findings further implied that play-based instructional activities should be strengthened through more intentional and learner-responsive strategies to help more learners progress toward the Proficient and Advanced levels.

Correlation Matrix Between Literacy Skills and Play-Based Instruction

It was hypothesized that utilization of play-based instruction influences learners' literacy skills. The chi square of independent sample was used to test the hypothesis of no correlation. Table 3 presents the correlation analysis. The table presents the relationship between class performance in literacy skills and the utilization of play-based instruction, using the Chi-square test and Cramer's V to measure the strength of association. The results show that two dimensions of play-based instruction have a statistically significant relationship with literacy performance:

Child-Centered Play Environment ($\chi^2 = 19.8$, $df = 6$, $p = .003$, Cramer's $V = .547$) indicates a significant and strong association between a child-centered play environment and learners' literacy performance. Classrooms that promote exploration, creativity, and learner autonomy tend to have better literacy outcomes. Play-Based Literacy Engagement ($\chi^2 = 13.5$, $df = 6$, $p = .035$, Cramer's $V = .453$) also shows a significant and moderate to strong relationship, suggesting that engaging learners in literacy-rich play activities contributes positively to their literacy development.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix Between Literacy Skills and Play-Based Instruction

Pair of Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramer's V
Class Performance in Literacy Skills and...				
Child-Centered Play Environment	19.8*	6	.003	.547
Teacher Facilitation During Play	4.10	6	.664	.249



Play-Based Literacy Engagement	13.5*	6	.035	.453
Active Participation Through Play	5.98	6	.426	.301

- Significant at $\leq .05$

On the other hand, two dimensions were found to have no significant relationship with literacy performance: Teacher Facilitation During Play ($\chi^2 = 4.10$, $df = 6$, $p = .664$, Cramer's $V = .249$) Although the association is weak to moderate, it is not statistically significant, indicating that facilitation alone may not directly influence literacy outcomes without other supporting factors. Active Participation Through Play ($\chi^2 = 5.98$, $df = 6$, $p = .426$, Cramer's $V = .301$) also shows a non-significant relationship, suggesting that while participation is important, it may not independently predict literacy performance.

Overall, the findings implied that the quality and nature of play, particularly child-centered and literacy-focused activities, were more critical to literacy development than participation or facilitation alone. The significant relationship between child-centered play and literacy performance highlighted the importance of classrooms that encouraged autonomy, exploration, and creativity. Similarly, play-based literacy engagement showed a significant influence on learners' literacy performance, suggesting that intentional play activities supported language and early reading development. In contrast, the non-significant result in teacher facilitation suggested that facilitation practices may have needed to be more targeted and closely aligned with literacy goals to produce measurable outcomes.

The findings further revealed that not all aspects of play-based instruction equally influenced literacy performance. Child-centered environments and literacy-focused play activities showed the strongest influence on learners' literacy skills, reinforcing the importance of intentional and meaningful play experiences in early childhood education.

These findings were supported by the study of Angela Pyle (2024), which found that play-based learning environments promoting child autonomy and exploration significantly improved early literacy skills, particularly oral language and communication abilities. Similarly, recent studies on the play-literacy interface emphasized that play provided meaningful opportunities for storytelling, interaction, and symbolic thinking, which supported literacy acquisition. In the Philippine context, the study of Bernadine Sarah E. Liwag and Melinda F. Marquez (2024–2025) revealed that emergent literacy skills were significantly associated with play-based learning experiences, especially those involving social interaction and language-rich classroom environments.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between play-based learning practices and the literacy skills development of kindergarten learners. The findings revealed that teachers consistently implement play-based instruction in their classrooms, particularly in creating child-centered environments and integrating literacy-related activities through play. Over time, learners showed clear improvement in their literacy performance, as reflected in the shift from lower proficiency levels in the third quarter to higher levels in the fourth quarter, indicating growth in their early reading and language skills.

The results of the correlation analysis further showed that not all play-based practices equally influence literacy development. Child-centered play environments and literacy-focused play engagement demonstrated significant relationships with learners' literacy performance, suggesting that when play is meaningful, interactive, and aligned with learning goals, it can effectively support literacy development. On the other hand, teacher facilitation and active participation, although consistently present in classroom practice, did not show a direct significant relationship with literacy outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that the influence of play-based learning does not rely solely on its presence in the classroom, but on how it is designed and implemented. Play that is intentional, engaging, and connected to literacy objectives provides greater opportunities for learners to develop essential language and reading skills. This highlights the importance of strengthening and balancing play-based strategies to ensure that they contribute meaningfully to learners' literacy development.



Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Improvement of Practice. Strengthen Child-Centered and Literacy-Focused Play. Teachers are encouraged to continuously create child-centered play environments and design literacy-focused play activities, as these were found to have a significant influence on learners' literacy development. Emphasis should be placed on meaningful, engaging, and intentional play experiences that promote language use, interaction, and comprehension. Increase the Use of Interactive and Expressive Play Strategies. While structured activities such as phonics games and songs are widely used, teachers should enhance their use of interactive and expressive play strategies such as role-playing, storytelling, puppet play, and dramatization. These approaches can further develop learners' oral language, creativity, and communication skills. Enhance Intentional Teaching During Play. Teachers should strengthen their facilitation strategies by making play more purposeful and aligned with literacy objectives. This includes using effective questioning, scaffolding, and guided interactions to ensure that play activities contribute directly to literacy development.

For Policy and School Implementation. Continuous Monitoring of Literacy Development. Schools should regularly monitor learners' literacy performance through quarterly assessments and classroom-based evaluations. This will allow teachers to identify learners' needs and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. Professional Development for Teachers. Training programs, LAC sessions, and workshops should be conducted to enhance teachers' competence in implementing balanced and effective play-based instruction. Focus should be given to integrating literacy skills into play and improving facilitation techniques. Integration into School Programs. Play-based instructional strategies should be institutionalized by integrating them into the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). This will ensure consistency and sustainability of implementation across kindergarten classrooms.

For Future Research. Future studies may explore other factors that influence literacy development in play-based classrooms and use more advanced research designs to deepen understanding.

1. Replicating the Influence of Play-Based Learning on Literacy Skills Development among Kindergarten Learners in Different School Contexts.
2. An Experimental Study on the Effectiveness of Interactive and Expressive Play Strategies in Enhancing Early Literacy Skills.
3. Home Learning Environment, Learner Motivation, and Teacher Competence as Predictors of Literacy Development in Play-Based Classrooms.
4. A Longitudinal Study on the Impact of Play-Based Instruction on Literacy Development among Early Childhood Learners.
5. A Mixed-Methods Study on Teachers' Practices in Implementing Child-Centered and Literacy-Focused Play in Kindergarten Classrooms

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