



Research Article

Kindergarten Teachers' Stories on the Implementation of Play-Based Learning

Anazul L. Pitogo

Department of Education

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Submission: June, 2026

Revised: July, 2026

Accepted: August, 2026

Published: August, 2026

Originality: 97%

Similarity Index: 4%

Grammarly Score: 98%

*Corresponding Author:

pitogo.anazul@deped.gov.ph

Recommended Citation:

Pitogo, A., (2026). Kindergarten Teachers' Stories on the Implementation of Play-Based Learning. *Journal of Educational Research, Innovation, and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(6), 61-66.

<https://doi.org/10.67001/jeri.2026.06.A1K7WM>

This study explored the twelve (12) kindergarten teachers' stories on the implementation of play-based learning in Sinacaban District, Division of Misamis Occidental during School Year 2025-2026. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with twelve kindergarten teachers and were analysed thematically. Findings revealed three major themes. First, teachers implemented diverse play-based practices including role-play, games, storytelling, and hands-on activities, which fostered learner engagement, curiosity, and holistic development. Second, teachers faced significant challenges such as time constraints due to curriculum pressure, lack of materials and resources, limited classroom space, classroom management difficulties, learner diversity, and institutional policies prioritizing academics over play. Third, teachers recommended interventions including resource enhancement, time and curriculum adjustments, professional development, and instructional improvement strategies like guided play with clear objectives. The study concludes that, although teachers demonstrate resilience and creativity in implementing play-based learning despite persistent barriers, sustainable implementation requires systemic support such as adequate resources, flexible curriculum structures, and collaborative professional development. Play-based learning thrives when teachers, administrators, and policymakers collectively value play as the natural and essential way young children learn and develop.

Keywords: challenges, interventions, kindergarten teachers, lived experiences, play-based learning

Copyright Notice:

2026 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

Introduction

Play-based learning (PBL) is an educational approach that uses play as the primary means through which young children learn, shifting instruction from teacher-centered methods toward child-centered learning. In kindergarten classrooms, educational games, manipulatives, storytelling, guided play, and group exploration provide children with meaningful opportunities to develop early literacy, numeracy, social skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Through these experiences, children actively explore concepts while developing cognitive, social, emotional, language, and physical skills. Aguilar (2024) emphasized that play-based learning contributes to children's imagination, cognitive abilities, emotional development, language skills, and motor development. Thus, PBL is considered an important approach in early childhood education because it allows learning to occur naturally through exploration, interaction, and meaningful experiences.

In the Philippine educational setting, play-based learning is supported by national policies governing kindergarten education. DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016, or the *Omnibus Policy on Kindergarten Education*, provides the framework for implementing Republic Act No. 10157 and emphasizes that kindergarten education should be developmentally appropriate, child-centered, and play-based. It encourages teachers to use guided and free play to promote children's holistic development while developing foundational competencies in literacy, numeracy, social behavior, and emotional competence. DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 further supports the implementation of appropriate learning approaches through the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide and related curriculum documents. These policies demonstrate the importance given to play as an essential part of the teaching-learning process for young children.

Despite these policies and the recognized benefits of play-based learning, kindergarten teachers continue to encounter challenges in its actual classroom implementation. Teachers may handle large classes, have limited learning materials, and face expectations from parents and the school regarding children's academic preparation. Some teachers also have limited opportunities for specialized training in early childhood education and play-based pedagogy. Another concern involves the qualifications and preparation of teachers assigned to kindergarten classes, particularly when their professional preparation is focused primarily on elementary education rather than early childhood education. These conditions may affect teachers' ability to design meaningful play activities, connect them with required learning competencies, and maintain a developmentally appropriate learning environment while meeting curriculum and institutional expectations.

Assessment presents another significant challenge in implementing play-based learning. Teachers may observe creativity during dramatic play, problem-solving during block activities, cooperation during group play, and resilience during games, yet translating these observations into measurable and documented learning outcomes can be difficult. Dinnocenzo (2024) noted that teachers may experience difficulty assessing literacy and other developmental skills during play-based activities. Consequently, teachers must balance the child-centered and flexible nature of play with curriculum standards, documentation requirements, assessment expectations, and other institutional demands. These competing responsibilities may create a gap between the philosophy of play-based learning and its actual implementation, requiring teachers to develop their own strategies for adapting classroom practices while remaining responsive to educational policies and expected learning outcomes.

Given these realities, there is a need to understand the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers who implement play-based learning in their classrooms. This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the experiences of kindergarten teachers in the Sinacaban District, Division of Misamis Occidental, focusing on their personal experiences, teaching practices, challenges, and sources of motivation in implementing play-based learning. By examining how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to the realities of PBL, the study seeks to generate insights that may contribute to improved instructional practices, assessment approaches, professional development programs, and institutional support. Ultimately, the findings may help kindergarten teachers create learning environments that effectively integrate play with required competencies while remaining developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and responsive to the holistic needs of young learners.

Methods

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing play-based learning. The study involved 12 purposively selected kindergarten teachers from public elementary schools in the Sinacaban District who had at least three years of

teaching experience. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analysis to capture the participants' experiences, beliefs, practices, and challenges. The collected data were transcribed, coded, categorized, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns and themes. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, were observed throughout the research process.

Results and Discussions

Theme 1: Purposeful and Engaging Play-Based Classroom Practices

The first theme that emerged from the participants' experiences was Purposeful and Engaging Play-Based Classroom Practices. Kindergarten teachers described play-based learning as an intentional teaching approach that uses role-playing, games, storytelling, dramatization, hands-on and sensory activities, learning centers, and manipulatives to make learning meaningful to young children. These practices were not simply intended to entertain learners; rather, teachers deliberately connected play activities with specific learning objectives. For instance, classroom markets and grocery-store role-playing activities allowed children to practice counting, communication, cooperation, turn-taking, and problem-solving within one meaningful experience. One participant explained that before conducting a play-based activity, the learning objective was identified first, followed by determining how learners could discover the concept through play instead of merely listening to a lecture. This demonstrates that effective play-based learning requires intentional planning and a clear connection between play and the competencies that children are expected to develop. The participants therefore viewed play as a structured but flexible instructional process through which young learners actively construct knowledge from meaningful experiences rather than passively receive information from the teacher.

The teachers' experiences further showed that play-based classroom practices provide opportunities to integrate different developmental and academic skills. A market activity, for example, may simultaneously develop mathematical skills through counting, language skills through conversation, and social skills through cooperation and turn-taking. Hands-on and sensory experiences similarly enable children to understand concepts through direct manipulation and exploration. Such findings suggest that play-based learning is particularly suitable for kindergarten because children do not necessarily learn different competencies in isolation. Instead, they learn through experiences that involve thinking, communicating, moving, interacting, and exploring at the same time. The teachers' use of diverse activities also indicates their awareness that young learners have different interests and ways of engaging with classroom content. Consequently, role-playing, games, storytelling, manipulatives, and sensory activities provide multiple opportunities for children to participate and demonstrate what they know. Cheung et al. (2022) emphasized that developing kindergarten teachers' capacity for play-based curriculum requires intentional planning and reflective practice, while Danniels and Pyle (2023) found that kindergarten teachers use inclusive play-based approaches that incorporate different activities to respond to diverse learner needs. These findings support the participants' experiences that successful play-based learning depends on purposeful design, integration of multiple skills, and responsiveness to children's natural ways of learning.

The theme is also consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, as cited by Kurniati (2025), which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and guided participation in children's cognitive development. Play situations allow children to interact with classmates and teachers, imitate roles, communicate ideas, solve problems, and receive assistance when necessary. Through these interactions, children can accomplish tasks that may be difficult to perform independently. The teachers therefore serve not only as providers of play materials but also as facilitators who organize environments, provide guidance, ask questions, and connect children's experiences with intended learning outcomes. The findings imply that the educational value of play does not depend simply on allowing children to play; rather, it depends on how teachers purposefully design and facilitate play so that exploration and enjoyment lead to meaningful learning. In this sense, play-based classroom practices represent a deliberate pedagogical strategy where academic objectives and children's natural desire to explore are brought together within developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Theme 2: Active Participation, Confidence, and Holistic Learner Development

The second theme was Active Participation, Confidence, and Holistic Learner Development, which reflects teachers' observations of how children responded to play-based learning. Participants consistently observed

that learners became more active, curious, expressive, and willing to participate when lessons involved meaningful play. Instead of remaining passive recipients of information, children explored materials, asked questions, communicated with classmates, solved problems, and discovered concepts through their own experiences. One participant described a water-cycle activity in which learners used cotton balls as clouds and droppers to represent rain. The children personally handled the materials and became highly excited when they observed water falling from their cotton clouds. Such an experience illustrates how play can transform an abstract concept into something concrete and understandable for young learners. The activity captured children's attention because they were not simply told how rain occurs; they were allowed to observe, manipulate, and experience a representation of the process themselves. Teachers likewise reported that learners demonstrated cooperation and problem-solving during play and that some shy learners became more confident and expressive. These observations indicate that engagement in play involves meaningful cognitive, social, and emotional participation rather than simply keeping children occupied.

A particularly significant finding was the ability of play-based learning to encourage participation among children who were usually hesitant to speak during conventional classroom activities. Teachers observed that some shy learners who rarely responded during regular questioning began talking and explaining their ideas when engaged in play. This suggests that play creates a less threatening learning environment where children feel safer expressing themselves, experimenting with ideas, and making mistakes. In traditional questioning situations, some young learners may experience pressure to provide the correct answer, whereas play allows communication to occur more naturally as part of the activity. This environment can strengthen confidence and gradually encourage children to participate more actively in classroom interactions. Teachers also observed that when learners enjoyed an activity, concepts such as numbers, letter sounds, and names were more easily remembered. This indicates a relationship between emotional engagement and cognitive learning: when children are interested and actively involved, they may devote greater attention to the learning experience and form stronger connections with the concepts being taught. The participants' accounts therefore demonstrate that enjoyment and learning are not opposing goals in kindergarten education; rather, enjoyment can provide the motivation that encourages children to explore and persist in learning.

The participants' experiences are supported by literature included in the soft copy. Bjelde (2021) found that play-based learning in preschool and kindergarten classrooms promotes healthy development by encouraging engagement and active participation, while Aguilar (2024) emphasized that play-based learning supports children's natural curiosity and exploration. The participants similarly observed that play encouraged learners to become active agents in their own learning and naturally develop problem-solving, cooperation, communication, and confidence. These findings can further be understood through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, as cited by Kurniati (2025), which explains that children can perform beyond their independent abilities when supported through interactions with peers and knowledgeable adults. During collaborative play, children communicate, observe one another, negotiate roles, solve problems together, and receive guidance from their teachers. These interactions provide opportunities for cognitive and social development within the zone of proximal development. Thus, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of play-based learning lies partly in its capacity to transform the classroom into an interactive environment where participation, confidence, exploration, and social relationships contribute simultaneously to children's holistic development.

Theme 3: Navigating Constraints Through Teacher Creativity, Structure, and Adaptability

The third theme that emerged was Navigating Constraints Through Teacher Creativity, Structure, and Adaptability. Although teachers strongly valued play-based learning, their narratives revealed that its implementation was not always easy. Participants encountered limitations involving instructional time, curriculum requirements, learning materials, classroom space, large classes, and classroom management. Teachers particularly struggled to provide uninterrupted play experiences while also covering the competencies required by the curriculum. One participant explained that the pressure to cover competencies such as writing and formal mathematics left very little time in the daily schedule for uninterrupted play. Another participant identified time, resources, and classroom management as major challenges to consistently implementing the approach. These experiences indicate that teachers may understand and support the principles of play-based learning but still face structural conditions that limit their ability to implement them fully. Time constraints can reduce the duration of exploration, while curriculum pressure can encourage teachers to prioritize the completion of required competencies over extended play experiences.

Resource limitations further intensified these challenges. Teachers reported insufficient instructional materials, manipulatives, learning tools, and play equipment, requiring many of them to create their own teaching materials. The preparation of teacher-made resources was itself time-consuming, creating a cycle in which the lack of materials increased teachers' workload and further reduced the time available for instructional preparation. One participant explained that preparing materials was time-consuming because of the lack of resources, while another identified limited materials, time constraints, and classroom management as interconnected difficulties. Despite these limitations, the teachers demonstrated resourcefulness by using available and improvised materials and adjusting activities according to their circumstances. The findings suggest that the implementation of play-based learning in resource-constrained classrooms depends considerably on teachers' creativity and flexibility. Coggio (2023) similarly found that resource limitations can become significant barriers to play-based instructional practices and influence teachers' confidence in implementing them, while Martin (2024) reported substantial resource challenges among kindergarten teachers working in under-resourced classrooms. Thus, adequate materials and institutional support are important not merely for convenience but for sustaining meaningful and consistent play-based instruction.

Classroom management also required teachers to find an appropriate balance between children's freedom and teacher guidance. Play activities sometimes became noisy or disorganized, children argued over roles or materials, and some learners became overly excited and lost focus on the intended learning objective. However, the participants did not necessarily respond by abandoning play. Instead, they paused activities, clarified instructions, reminded learners about cooperation, established classroom rules, provided positive reinforcement, and redirected children toward the learning goal. One participant reflected that play-based learning was effective but required clear guidance and structure from the teacher. This experience highlights an important realization: child-centered learning does not mean the absence of teacher direction. Rather, effective play requires teachers to create boundaries and provide enough structure to keep children safe, cooperative, and focused while still allowing exploration and independence. Coggio (2023) emphasized that classroom management and teacher self-efficacy influence teachers' capacity to navigate barriers to play-based instruction, while Crocker (2026) highlighted the importance of maintaining structure while supporting child-initiated play. Overall, the theme demonstrates that successful implementation of play-based learning relies not only on teachers' belief in the value of play but also on their professional ability to adapt to limitations, improvise resources, manage dynamic classroom situations, and maintain a meaningful balance between freedom and guidance. These adaptive practices reveal teachers as active problem-solvers who continuously reshape play-based instruction according to the realities of their classrooms.

Conclusions

The study concluded that kindergarten teachers use play-based learning as their main teaching method which helps children grow in all areas of development, but teachers face multiple difficulties because they have too little time and too few materials and their classrooms are too full, and schools compel them to focus on academic work instead of playtime. Teachers use their strong determination together with their inventive problem-solving skills to create adaptive solutions which include structured teaching design and dynamic classroom control and recycling projects and their practice of self-evaluation to create a balance between organized activities and student-driven learning. The effective use of play-based learning requires comprehensive system backing which includes all necessary resources and adaptable educational frameworks and continuous teacher training and group learning processes because play-based learning serves as a fundamental educational method that depends on teachers and school leaders and educational decision makers to recognize play as the main method through which young children develop and learn.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that kindergarten learners be provided with age-appropriate, joyful, and learner-centered play experiences that promote curiosity, exploration, and holistic development; kindergarten teachers should continuously improve their play-based practices through reflection, Learning Action Cells (LACs), collaboration, and sharing of effective strategies, particularly in addressing challenges related to time, resources, and classroom management; parents should actively support play-based learning at home through simple play activities, storytelling, role-playing, and the provision of available learning materials; school heads should provide adequate resources, appropriate classroom spaces,

flexible schedules, professional development opportunities, and continuous support to strengthen the implementation of play-based learning; stakeholders, including NGOs and training institutions, should develop relevant training programs, advocacy initiatives, and resource support responsive to the actual needs of kindergarten classrooms; policy makers should review and strengthen policies that provide sufficient time, materials, manageable class sizes, and institutional support for meaningful play-based learning; and future researchers should conduct similar studies in different schools, districts, and socioeconomic contexts and examine the long-term effects of play-based learning on children's academic, social, and emotional development, including the perspectives of learners and parents, to further strengthen the sustainable implementation of play-based learning in kindergarten education.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

References

- [1] Aguilar, M. A. (2024). Play-based learning in early childhood education: Promoting children's cognitive, social, emotional, language, and motor development. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 12(2), 45–58.
- [2] Bjelde, K. (2021). Play-based learning in preschool and kindergarten classrooms: Supporting healthy development through active engagement. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 10(2), 115–130.
- [3] Cheung, A., Keung, C., Kwan, P., & Cheung, L. (2022). Teachers' perceptions of the role of play in young children's learning and development. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(3), 377–389.
- [4] Coggio, M. (2023). Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of barriers to play-based instructional practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 44(3), 315–331.
- [5] Crocker, S. (2026). Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on play-based learning practices: Balancing structure and child-initiated play. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 54(2), 201–214.
- [6] Danniels, E., & Pyle, A. (2023). Inclusive play-based learning: Approaches to supporting diverse learners in kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(4), 625–637.
- [7] Department of Education. (2016). *DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016: Omnibus policy on kindergarten education*. Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines.
- [8] Department of Education. (2019). *DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019: Policy guidelines on the K to 12 basic education program*. Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines.
- [9] Dinnocenzo, A. M. (2024). Assessing literacy and developmental skills through play-based learning in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Assessment*, 18(2), 101–116.
- [10] Kurniati, E. (2025). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and play-based learning in early childhood education. *International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 17(1), 25–39.
- [11] Martin, J. R. (2024). Kindergarten teachers' experiences implementing play-based learning in under-resourced classrooms. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 26(1), 41–56.
- [12] Republic of the Philippines. (2012). *Republic Act No. 10157: Kindergarten Education Act*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines.
- [13] Republic of the Philippines. (2012). *Republic Act No. 10173: Data Privacy Act of 2012*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines.
- [14] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.