

Play-Based Learning as an Effective Approach to English as a Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of play-based learning (PBL) as an instructional approach for improving English as a Second Language (ESL) development among preschool, kindergarten, and early primary learners (Grades 1–3). The research examines how interactive, child-centered activities—such as games, storytelling, songs, role-play, and movement-based tasks—support essential language skills, particularly vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, pronunciation, and learner confidence. Specifically, the study aims to determine teachers' perceptions of PBL, document their classroom experiences, identify challenges in implementation, describe learner responses, and outline strategies used to adapt PBL for diverse learning needs and contexts. Using mixed-method research design, supported by teacher surveys, the study gathered data on instructional practices and learning outcomes. Findings reveal a strong positive correlation between play-based activities and improved ESL performance, with teachers reporting significant gains in students' vocabulary retention, oral communication, engagement, and willingness to participate in English-speaking tasks. Results also highlight increased motivation among learners, strengthened peer interaction, and enhanced classroom dynamics. Although teachers noted challenges such as limited resources, classroom management concerns, and time constraints, they emphasized that flexible adaptation and multimodal strategies make PBL highly practical and effective. The study concludes that structured and well-integrated play-based learning should be widely incorporated into ESL instruction to foster meaningful, enjoyable, and holistic language development.

Keywords: Education; play-based learning, ESL development, mixed-method research design, Philippines