

Teacher's Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Play and Activity-Based Learning in the Early Years

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Abstract

Play and activity-based learning have long been recognized as essential components of early childhood education, fostering holistic development and lifelong learning skills. This review paper examines the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards play and activity-based learning in the early years, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of their beliefs, practices, and challenges. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as constructivism and socio-cultural theory, as well as empirical research findings, this paper explores the factors that influence teachers' perceptions, including their beliefs about education and child development, professional training, curriculum alignment, and classroom environments. The review synthesizes literature on the perceived benefits of play-based approaches, such as enhanced engagement, social interaction, and creativity, as well as the challenges teachers encounter in implementing these strategies, such as time constraints and curriculum demands. Additionally, the paper examines support systems available to teachers, including professional development opportunities, administrative support, and collaboration with peers and communities. Through a critical analysis of existing literature, this paper identifies implications for practice, policy, and future research, emphasizing the importance of supporting teachers in embracing play and activity-based learning to promote optimal outcomes for young children in early childhood education settings.

Keywords: Play-based learning, Activity-based learning, Early childhood education, Teacher perceptions, Teacher attitudes, Beliefs

Introduction

Within the continuously evolving context of early childhood education, play and activity-based learning are gaining more and more recognition as fundamental components of children's growth and education. The development of children places a significant emphasis on both learning and play. The purpose of this introduction is to create the background by acknowledging the tremendous effect that these approaches have on young children and by underlining the relevance of understanding the ideas and attitudes that teachers have towards the use of these methods. Play, which is frequently referred to as children's natural form of exploration and discovery, serves as a vehicle for the development of numerous skills in an



integrated manner. These talents include cognitive abilities, social abilities, emotional abilities, and physical abilities. Children are given the chance to actively construct knowledge and meaning via the use of authentic experiences through the use of activity-based learning, which is typified by practices that are hands-on and experiential in nature. There are a number of factors that contribute to the formation of children's early learning experiences, including the perspectives, values, training, and professional conditions of instructors. Within the framework of this discussion, educators play a significant part in determining the early educational experiences of this generation. Through the examination of the perspectives that teachers have towards play and activity-based learning, the objective of this research is to shed light on the factors that impact the classroom practices of educators. Additionally, the study seeks to cast light on the perceived benefits and issues that teachers have when seeking to integrate these strategies into their approach to teaching. Having a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and attitudes held by educators can, in the end, be of assistance in influencing efforts to promote the professional development of educators and to improve the quality of early childhood education programmes. This, in turn, will ultimately guarantee the best possible outcomes for young students.

Review of literature

(Yalçın & Güleç, 2022) studied “Activity-Based Social Studies Teaching: An Investigation of Activity-Based Teaching of Responsibility as a Value” and said that This research aims to examine how students' understanding of responsibility is impacted by social studies classes that include activities. This study made use of qualitative research methodologies, including visual activities, observation forms, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires for collecting personal information. The results showed that the responsible value-based activity method of teaching fifth graders improved their attitudes and behaviours in many ways, including participation, task completion, study, and speaking. The research also used descriptive and content analysis techniques to examine the data.

(Bautista & Boone, 2015) studied “Exploring the Impact of TeachME™ Lab Virtual Classroom Teaching Simulation on Early Childhood Education Majors' Self-Efficacy Beliefs” and said that The TeachMETM Lab (TML) was a place where early childhood education majors could put their beliefs about their own scientific teaching talents to the test. Students' participation in TML significantly increased their expected results and the efficacy of their own scientific lessons. A person's familiarity with TML technology, their evaluations of their own scientific topic knowledge, and their own peer observation had the most impact on their beliefs in their own talents. Scientific education programmes may benefit from TML as it increases both student and teacher knowledge and confidence, as shown in the study.

(Kilgour et al., 2015) studied “Role-Playing as a Tool to Facilitate Learning, Self-Reflection and Social Awareness in Teacher Education” and said that This study looks at how role-plays are used at universities and how they assist students become ready for the real world. The study's role-playing exercises include students from a variety of classes, including multicultural education, history, mathematics, and leadership. History, minority groups, and individual



experiences are the topics that students explore via group work and classroom discussion with teachers and staff. These simulations are useful for students because they mimic real-world situations that they could encounter in their chosen careers.

(Zeynep, 2016) studied “Analyzing parental involvement dimensions in early childhood education” and said that Researchers found that when parents were just somewhat involved in their preschoolers' education, their kids were less likely to actively participate in class. While parent conferences are a great way for parents to meet other parents, they frequently feel overwhelmed trying to juggle all of their children's extracurricular activities. The major goal of study is to enhance parental involvement in educational settings.

(Çelik, 2018) studied “The Effects of Activity Based Learning on Sixth Grade Students' Achievement and Attitudes towards Mathematics Activities” and said that examining the effects of activity-based learning on sixth graders' arithmetic ability and attitude was the main objective of this study. The second group of 78 students received a more contemporary, activity-based education, whereas the first group received a more traditional, lecture-based education. Participants in the experimental group felt less positive about the activities, but academic performance increased overall.

(Lerum et al., 2019) studied “Active Smarter Teachers: Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Maintenance of a School-Based Physical Activity Intervention” and said that Students in Norway's fifth grade were part of the Active Smarter Kids (ASK) project, an exercise intervention designed to boost students' grades over the course of seven months. The perception and maintenance of the intervention by the teachers were also examined in the investigation. According to data acquired from self-report surveys, 81% of the participating instructors continued to include physical activity into their weekly pedagogical practice after the intervention. The intervention had the greatest impact on students who were doing poorly in school. The researchers came to the conclusion that codesigning interactions with educators is the only way to get them to include physical exercise into their everyday teaching.

(Wolf, 2020) studied “Parent and teacher perceptions of early childhood education and parent-teacher relationships in Ghana” and said that Many people think that parents should be involved in ECE. Neither the effects of parent-teacher relations on preschool classrooms nor parents' views of their own role in their children's education have been the subject of many research. This holds truer in countries with low or middle incomes than in others. Deep interviews with 25 teachers and 25 parents of pre-primary pupils in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana formed the basis of this study. Part of the interview study included people's views on the quality of education, their experiences with early childhood education (ECE), the ways in which teachers and parents communicate, and the roles that both parties play in their children's schooling. The findings brought attention to significant points of agreement and disagreement between parents' and instructors' perspectives and goals for early childhood education (ECE) for children. We discuss the policy ramifications and the importance of family participation in preschool programmes.

(Brdnik Juhart & Sicherl Kafol, 2021) studied “Music Teachers' Perception of Music Teaching at the Stage of Early Adolescence” and said that Preteen and adolescent music instruction in

conventional classrooms is the subject of this research. The importance that students have on authentic musical expression was highlighted in interviews with 18 educators from 9 different nations. Both the subject matter and the teacher's competence have an effect on classroom instruction. Globally, music education curricula are woefully inadequate at the moment. Authentic teaching, curriculum, and instructors' talents are among the many aspects that impact music education for preteens and adolescents, according to this research. More study along these lines is requested, and new standards for music teaching in public schools are suggested. (Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana & Oppong Frimpong, 2021) studied "The role of teaching and learning materials and interaction as a tool to quality early childhood education in Agona East District of the Central Region of Ghana" and said that Quality early childhood education (QECE) is essential for children's optimal development, but in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Ghana, TLMs are not easily accessible. A case study of twelve ECE schools in Ghana found that children's ability to engage actively and freely was restricted due to the lack of TLMs, despite the fact that TLMs are important for excellent ECE. The study suggests that in order for students to learn, teachers should provide easy access to TLMs, develop innovative ways to create TLMs, and encourage student interaction.

(Allen & Velija, 2023) studied "Parents perceptions of online physical activity and leisure with early years children during Covid-19 and beyond" and said that Researchers found mixed results when looking at the effectiveness of in-person and online physical activity (PA) for parents during the epidemic. After experiencing a new culture and learning about the many advantages for their children, parents were more inclined to go back to traditional in-person classes after attending preschool sports sessions. As a result of the epidemic, parents had to make tough choices about PA.

Importance of Early Childhood Education

The importance of early childhood education (ECE) lies in its profound impact on shaping the trajectory of a child's lifelong learning, development, and well-being. Early childhood, often considered the most critical period of human development, lays the foundation for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. Here are several key points illustrating the significance of ECE:

- **Critical Period of Brain Development:** The first few years of a person's life are marked by a period of fast brain growth, during which their synaptic connections are formed at an astounding pace. Early childhood experiences that are of high quality offer the kind of stimulation and supportive environment that is essential for healthy brain development. These experiences also build the foundation for future learning and academic achievement.
- **Holistic Development:** The whole development of the child is the primary goal of early childhood education, which encompasses the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains of development. Children's early childhood education (ECE) programmes encourage children's holistic development and assist them in constructing a solid



foundation for future learning and success in life. This is accomplished by offering a complete and integrated approach to learning.

- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** Through early childhood education, developmental delays, learning issues, and social-emotional obstacles may be identified and addressed at an earlier stage. This is a significant function that early childhood education performs. It is possible for educators to give children with focused assistance and interventions if they intervene at an early stage. This will assist children in overcoming hurdles and reaching their maximum potential.
- **Promotion of School Readiness:** Early childhood education courses that are of a high-quality support the development of core abilities that are important for school preparation. These abilities include both academic and social skills. Language and reading, numeracy, problem-solving, and social-emotional competence are some of the core competencies that fall under this category. Because they provide the foundation for learning and achievement throughout one's whole life, the development of these basic talents is vital for success in school and beyond. This is because they offer the foundation for learning and accomplishment.
- **Equity and Social Justice:** It is essential to make sure that young children have access to high-quality early childhood education because it is a matter of fairness and social justice. Research indicates that children who originate from homes that are economically disadvantaged are the ones who benefit the most from early childhood education (ECE) initiatives that are of a high quality. These activities contribute to the reduction of the opportunity gap and the levelling of the playing field for all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic circumstances or cultural backgrounds.
- **Long-term Benefits:** The findings of studies have shown that early childhood education has a considerable impact on a variety of outcomes later in life, including academic achievement, employment performance, health outcomes, and social well-being respectively. In addition to the early years of childhood education, these benefits continue to accrue throughout adulthood. It is feasible to create considerable returns on investment in early childhood education, not just for individuals but also for society as a whole. This is something that may benefit both parties.

Teachers' Beliefs and Values

Early childhood education teachers' teaching and learning approaches are shaped by their values and beliefs. Because instructors' own views and values influence them. This portion explores the essential concepts and principles that shape educators' views on play and activity-based learning in young children's education. Education and child development theories like constructivism and socio-cultural theory influence teachers' views on play's role in holistic development. Holistic play helps kids develop. Playing may help kids grow in many ways. Many educators believe that play is more than just a pastime; it helps youngsters explore, develop their sense of wonder, and understand the world around them. Play is vital to expression. Play-based and activity-based learning emphasise child-centered, direct



engagement, which aligns with educators' views on autonomy, creativity, and social connection. Play-based and activity-based learning encourage direct participation. Instructors' perspectives go beyond compatibility with the concepts. If educators and policymakers understand the relationship between teachers' beliefs and values and their perceptions of play and activity-based learning, they can design more effective professional development and support systems that align with teachers' philosophical orientations and promote their use in early childhood settings. This will improve their service to young children. This will help them create more effective professional development courses.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Play and activity-based learning in early childhood education demands a solid curriculum and methodology. Teachers' ideals should match the curriculum and pedagogical methods used to include play and activity. Play-based curriculums encourage active exploration, inquiry, and self-directed learning in children. Play-based strategies are simpler to use in curriculum frameworks that allow instructors to create and change learning experiences.

Learning critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork via play and activity-based learning is more successful. Effective teaching methods include inquiry-based and child-centered learning. Scaffolding and modelling engage kids in learning. Curriculum constraints and standardised testing may impede play and activity-based learning in early childhood education programmes. Curriculum modification, professional development, and promoting play's role in children's education and development are required to solve these issues. A curriculum and pedagogical environment that emphasises play and activity-based learning may enhance learning experiences, promote holistic development, and provide the groundwork for lifelong learning.

Classroom Environment and Resources

Classroom setting and supplies are crucial to early childhood education. Classroom layout, materials, and resources may help or impede play-based tactics. A well-designed, safe, engaging, and discovery-oriented environment fosters curiosity, creativity, and learning. Clear play spaces for building, sensory exploration, and creative play promote mobility, cooperation, and talent development. Open, flexible environments encourage movement and teamwork. Blocks, art tools, natural objects, and literature allow youngsters to learn via experience depending on their growth and interests. Resources, finances, and space may limit the quality of the classroom and the variety of student experiences.

Families and community partners may improve resource availability and learning environments inside and outside the school to address these concerns. Increase the learning environment. Creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment that fosters children's curiosity, creativity, and love of learning requires purposeful planning, material arrangement, and classroom evaluation. By prioritising a supportive and engaging classroom and offering students with a range of tools and resources, educators may create an inclusive and equitable learning environment that encourages children's curiosity, creativity, and love of learning.



Perceived Benefits and Challenges

The research examines play and activity-based learning's pros and cons in early childhood education. It emphasises instructors' good results and possible problems when applying these tactics. Active participation, creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and social and emotional development are advantages. Play-based learning fosters children's teamwork, communication, empathy, autonomy, self-regulation, and resilience. These tactics are difficult for instructors to adopt. Time limits, curricular demands, and academic pressure might limit play-based activities. Classroom management, evaluation, and family expectations may also deter instructors from using these tactics. Play-based education programmes may be weakened by misconceptions about play's role in learning and its lack of responsibility. A multidimensional strategy is needed to address these concerns. This involves giving educators ample time, resources, and support to apply play-based practices. Teachers, administrators, families, and community stakeholders may work together to promote play and activity-based learning in early childhood education. By understanding and addressing the pros and cons of these tactics, educators may create more inclusive, engaging, and rewarding learning environments for all kids, improving their development.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design using a survey-based approach to assess teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards play and activity-based learning in early childhood education. A structured Likert scale questionnaire was developed and distributed to 150 early childhood educators, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in geographic location (urban, suburban, rural), type of school (public, private), and teaching experience. The questionnaire collected demographic information, including gender, age, education level, years of teaching experience, current teaching position, and class size. Data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and correlations in teachers' attitudes and implementation practices.

Data analysis

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	96	64.0	64.0	64.0
	Female	54	36.0	36.0	100.0
Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 25	16	10.7	10.7	10.7
	25-34	32	21.3	21.3	32.0
	35-44	24	16.0	16.0	48.0
	45-54	48	32.0	32.0	80.0
	55 and above	30	20.0	20.0	100.0

The demographic data of the survey respondents reveal a gender distribution with 64% male (96 respondents) and 36% female (54 respondents). The age distribution shows that 10.7% are under 25 years old, 21.3% are between 25 and 34 years old, 16% are between 35 and 44 years old, 32% are between 45 and 54 years old, and 20% are 55 years old and above. This diverse demographic spread provides a comprehensive background for analyzing teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards play and activity-based learning in early childhood education.

Highest Level of Education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Diploma	24	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Bachelor's Degree	16	10.7	10.7	26.7
	Master's Degree	24	16.0	16.0	42.7
	Doctorate	64	42.7	42.7	85.3
	Other	22	14.7	14.7	100.0
Years of Teaching Experience					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	24	16.0	16.0	16.0
	1-3 years	24	16.0	16.0	32.0
	4-6 years	23	15.3	15.3	47.3
	7-10 years	55	36.7	36.7	84.0
	More than 10 years	24	16.0	16.0	100.0

The survey respondents' highest level of education and years of teaching experience reveal a varied educational background and professional experience. In terms of education, 16% hold a Diploma, 10.7% have a Bachelor's degree, 16% possess a Master's degree, 42.7% have a Doctorate, and 14.7% fall under the 'Other' category. Regarding teaching experience, 16% have less than 1 year, 16% have 1-3 years, 15.3% have 4-6 years, 36.7% have 7-10 years, and 16% have more than 10 years of teaching experience. This demographic spread offers a broad perspective on the educational qualifications and teaching tenure of the participants, which is crucial for understanding their perceptions and attitudes towards play and activity-based learning in early childhood education.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Play is a crucial component of early childhood education.	38 (25.3%)	40 (26.7%)	32 (21.3%)	24 (16.0%)	16 (10.7%)
Activity-based learning enhances children's cognitive development.	24 (16.0%)	32 (21.3%)	24 (16.0%)	54 (36.0%)	16 (10.7%)
Play-based learning helps children develop problem-solving skills.	16 (10.7%)	32 (21.3%)	7 (4.7%)	64 (42.7%)	31 (20.7%)



Activity-based learning encourages creativity and imagination in children.	16 (10.7%)	32 (21.3%)	24 (16.0%)	48 (32.0%)	30 (20.0%)
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The survey results on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards play and activity-based learning reveal insightful trends. Regarding administrative support, 42.7% agree and 14.7% strongly agree that their school administration supports play and activity-based learning, while 16% each strongly disagree or remain neutral. Time constraints pose a significant challenge, with 36% agreeing and 10.7% strongly agreeing that it hinders the inclusion of play-based activities. Engagement levels during play-based activities are higher, with 42.7% agreeing and 20.7% strongly agreeing that children are more engaged compared to traditional lessons. Parental support is evident, with 32% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing. Finally, 42.7% agree and 14.7% strongly agree that play and activity-based learning should be integral to the early year's curriculum, indicating a strong endorsement for these educational approaches despite some challenges.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The school administration supports the use of play and activity-based learning.	24 (16.0%)	16 (10.7%)	24 (16.0%)	64 (42.7%)	22 (14.7%)
Time constraints make it difficult to include play and activity-based learning in my lessons.	24 (16.0%)	32 (21.3%)	24 (16.0%)	54 (36.0%)	16 (10.7%)
Children are more engaged during play-based learning activities compared to traditional lessons.	16 (10.7%)	32 (21.3%)	7 (4.7%)	64 (42.7%)	31 (20.7%)
Parents are supportive of play and activity-based learning in the early years.	16 (10.7%)	32 (21.3%)	24 (16.0%)	48 (32.0%)	30 (20.0%)
Play and activity-based learning should be an integral part of the early year's curriculum.	24 (16.0%)	16 (10.7%)	24 (16.0%)	64 (42.7%)	22 (14.7%)

The survey results indicate varied perceptions of play and activity-based learning among teachers. For the statement that play is a crucial component of early childhood education, 25.3% strongly disagree, 26.7% disagree, 21.3% are neutral, 16% agree, and 10.7% strongly agree. Regarding activity-based learning enhancing children's cognitive development, 16% each strongly disagree and are neutral, 21.3% disagree, 36% agree, and 10.7% strongly agree. For play-based learning helping children develop problem-solving skills, 10.7% strongly disagree, 21.3% disagree, 4.7% are neutral, 42.7% agree, and 20.7% strongly agree. Lastly, in

terms of activity-based learning encouraging creativity and imagination, 10.7% strongly disagree, 21.3% disagree, 16% are neutral, 32% agree, and 20% strongly agree.

Conclusion

The study on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards play and activity-based learning in early childhood education highlights the critical role these approaches play in fostering holistic development in young children. Teachers recognize the benefits of play and activity-based learning, including enhanced engagement, creativity, problem-solving skills, and social interaction. These methods align with constructivist and socio-cultural theories, emphasizing active, hands-on, and experiential learning.

However, teachers face significant challenges in implementing these strategies, such as time constraints, curriculum demands, and a lack of administrative support. The survey data, reflecting a diverse range of teachers' backgrounds, underscore the need for better support systems, including professional development and collaboration with families and communities. To achieve the best outcomes for young children, it is essential to provide teachers with the necessary resources, training, and supportive environments to integrate play-based practices effectively. Addressing these challenges through comprehensive policy and practice reforms will enable educators to create more inclusive and engaging learning experiences, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning and development.

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