ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

PLAY-BASED LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AMONG KINDERGARTEN LEARNERS IN THE POBLACION BARANGAYS OF MAYDOLONG, EASTERN SAMAR

Abegail Catubay Obina[1], Elsie Casimo Concan[2], Jason D. Magalona[3]
[1-2]MAEd Student, Graduate School, Eastern Samar State University-Borongan
[3]MAEd Adviser, Graduate School, Eastern Samar State University-Borongan

ABSTRACT
This study examined the impact of play-based learning on early literacy development among kindergarten learners in the Poblacion barangays of Maydolong, Eastern Samar. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the research assessed the extent of play-based learning implementation and the literacy levels of 137 learners across five public elementary schools. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated a very high level of implementation of play-based strategies, particularly guided play and activity-based learning. However, learners' early literacy development – measured in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, print awareness, and oral language – was found to be low. Statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between play-based learning implementation and literacy outcomes. The results suggest that although play-based learning is widely practiced, it may not be effectively aligned with specific literacy objectives. The study concludes that intentional, guided, and literacy-focused play activities, along with support from home and school, are essential to improve early literacy development.

KEYWORDS: *Play-based learning, early literacy development, kindergarten learners, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, print awareness, oral language skills, guided play, activity-based learning, descriptive-correlational design*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Early childhood marks a pivotal period in human development: during these formative years, children build the foundations of cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional capacities that shape future learning trajectories. Among the various pedagogical approaches deployed in early childhood education, play-based learning has gained strong traction in both research and practice. Unlike rote instruction, play-based learning empowers children to explore, imagine, experiment, and interact in rich, meaningful ways. In the context of literacy development, play offers fertile ground: through symbolic play, roleplay, games, storytelling, and peer interaction, young learners develop emergent literacy skills such as vocabulary, phonemic awareness, narrative competence, and print awareness. When play is intentionally scaffolded by educators, the benefits are even more pronounced, enabling children to internalize language structures, build confidence in literacy tasks, and lay a robust foundation for formal reading and writing.

Globally, policy reformers and early childhood experts have championed play-based learning as a cost-effective but powerful lever to boost early learning outcomes. At the same time, gaps remain in understanding how different types of play (free play, guided play, digital play) contribute to literacy across diverse contexts, especially in under-resourced or rural settings. In the Philippine setting, national curriculum reforms, particularly the MATATAG Curriculum, recognize play as central to kindergarten pedagogy, yet practical constraints— ranging from limited teacher training to scarcity of materials often compromise quality implementation. In municipalities such as Maydolong in Eastern Samar, these challenges are even more felt, given resource constraints and regional literacy concerns.

Thus, investigating the impact of play-based learning on early literacy in such a local context is not only timely but critical: it can generate locally relevant evidence, inform teacher training and resource allocation, and ultimately support policy-driven goals to improve reading readiness and functional literacy. Over the past decades, research from around the world has increasingly demonstrated the value of play in supporting early literacy development. Metaanalyses and systematic reviews shows that structured play interventions— especially guided play, where the adult subtly guides children's exploration without dominating—yield moderate but significant gains in language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, and emergent writing skills (e.g., Education Endowment Foundation's toolkit reports an average effect of + 4 months of learning). These findings point to the potency of play as a pedagogical tool: not simply for social or emotional development, but also for cognitive and academic outcomes. Importantly, this evidence often shows that guided play (teacher scaffolding, gently directed activities) is more effective than free play when the goal is literacy and early learning, suggesting that adult involvement is a key factor in translating playful activity into learning gains.

Beyond traditional play, recent scholarship has also begun to explore the role of digital play in early literacy. For instance, studies using interactive educational apps and game-based tools for alphabet recognition show that technology-mediated play can significantly improve letter knowledge and phonemic awareness among preschoolers. One quasi-experimental study in the Philippines found that a group of young learners who used technologybased games achieved substantial gains in alphabet recognition comparable to structured instruction. Moreover, innovative research combining artificial intelligence and storytelling has proposed frameworks (e.g., board-game–style

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

interactive storytelling) to advance narrative development, suggesting how play and emerging technologies may interface to support literacy. Yet, even as these opportunities expand, scholars caution that the global evidence base remains uneven. In many interventions, the type of play, the role of the adult, and the learning goal are not clearly differentiated, making it difficult to isolate which aspects of play produce which literacy outcomes. Further, most high-quality studies are carried out in more resourced settings, leaving open questions about scalability in low-resource or rural environments. In the Philippines, early childhood education policy strongly supports play-based learning, aligning with both developmental theory and empirical research.

The Department of Education's Kindergarten Curriculum (and the newer MATATAG Curriculum) foregrounds language and literacy domains, recommending play-based, mother-tongue-inclusive activities to scaffold phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and oral communication. This policy orientation reflects a belief that play is not frivolous but essential for building readiness and foundational skills that will serve learners in primary grades. Empirical research in the Philippines supports this policy direction. A recent study by Liwag and Marquez (2025) examined emergent literacy skills (such as alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and phonological awareness) among kindergarten learners, reporting meaningful but under-developed literacy competencies and identifying teacher–child interactions and resource access as critical determinants of readiness. Another study by Urado and Marquez (2025) explored how play-based learning influences both behavioral and academic progress in kindergarten, finding a positive relationship: classrooms with higher implementation of play-based learning registered gains in social interaction, self-regulation, and literacy numeracy skills. More focused intervention studies also abound. For example, a researcher in Bulacan implemented contextualized play-based activities to enhance kindergarten learners' phonemic awareness.

By the third quarter, the number of children correctly identifying rhymes increased significantly, illustrating how culturally and contextually adapted play can drive emergent literacy gains. Additionally, digital play has been leveraged to support early literacy: a recent master's thesis examined how digital play-based learning tools used in a kindergarten setting in Cebu positively correlated with both literacy and numeracy achievement. At the same time, there remain practical obstacles in the national context. Studies such as Florita and Sabud (2024) report that ECE teachers face challenges like limited time, classroom discipline, scarce play materials, and inconsistent parental support, all of which compromise the quality of playbased implementation. Moreover, a literature review by Ugalde et al. (2024) suggests that while play-based learning is widely advocated, there is still inadequate clarity on which play strategies most effectively support literacy and numeracy, particularly in public kindergarten settings. Turning to the local context, Maydolong, a municipality in Eastern Samar, provides an instructive setting for investigation. Eastern Samar, as part of the Eastern Visayas region, faces persistent literacy and readiness challenges. Government data indicate that functional literacy rates in Eastern Visayas remain relatively low: according to the 2024 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), only about 60.3 percent of individuals aged 10–64 in Eastern Samar are functionally literate. In response, the Department of Education Region 8 has strengthened its Project STARS (Strategic Techniques for Accelerating Readiness Skills), placing special emphasis on literacy in kindergarten to build a more solid foundation for lifelong learning. DepEd's efforts in the region are complemented by broader interventions: for the school year 2025–2026, the region's Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program will cover more than 343,000 learners, prioritizing reading interventions for struggling readers through tutorled support. These programs affirm the urgency of addressing early literacy, but they do not always explicitly leverage play-based learning within kindergarten classrooms. In Maydolong specifically, local schools contend with typical rural challenges: constrained budgets for play materials, limited teacher training in play pedagogy, and variability in class sizes.

Informal field reports from rural Eastern Samar suggest that many kindergarten teachers rely on traditional teaching methods and recitation rather than on play-rich, child-centered learning—a mismatch with national curriculum ideals. Moreover, there is a dearth of contextually grounded, empirical research on how play-based learning operates in Maydolong's public kindergartens: how teachers adapt to resource limitations, how children engage with play, and whether play-based literacy strategies lead to measurable improvements in emergent reading skills in this community are not well documented. In sum, while play-based learning is widely recognized internationally and nationally as a valuable strategy for promoting early literacy, there remains a significant evidence gap when it comes to rural, underserved contexts.

The municipality of Maydolong in Eastern Samar, with its specific socio-economic conditions, resource constraints, and curricular priorities, offers a critical site for research. By investigating how different play-based pedagogies operate in local kindergartens, and by measuring their effects on emergent literacy skills, this study generated actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and the community. Ultimately, such research informs more effective, context-sensitive early literacy interventions that align with both national policy goals and the lived realities of children in Maydolong.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigated the role of play-based learning in enhancing early literacy development among kindergarten learners in Maydolong, Eastern Samar.

To understand these concerns, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of implementation of play-based learning strategies in kindergarten classrooms in Maydolong? 2. What is the level of early literacy development of kindergarten learners in terms of:
    2.1. phonemic awareness,
    2.2. vocabulary development,
    2.3. print awareness, and
    2.4. oral language skills?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of play-based learning implementation and learners' early literacy development?

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design, which was appropriate for investigating the relationship between variables without manipulating them. Descriptive research allowed the researchers to systematically described the characteristics of respondents and classroom practices, while correlational research examined the strength and direction of the relationship between play-based learning strategies and early literacy development. This design was suitable for this study because it sought to determine whether kindergarten learners' exposure to play-based learning is associated with their performance in key literacy domains, including phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, print awareness, and oral language skills.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in public kindergarten classes situated in the Poblacion barangays of Maydolong, Eastern Samar such as Camada Elementary School, Omawas Elementary School, Maybocog Elementary School, Maydolong Central Elementary School, and Campakirit Elementary School. These barangays were selected because of their accessibility, concentration of established kindergarten programs, and presence of teaching and learning resources representative of the local educational context. Conducting the study in these central barangays ensures that the findings reflect the conditions experienced by most learners in Maydolong, providing a feasible and contextually grounded research setting.

Respondents of the Study

The The population of the study consisted of 137 kindergarten learners and their respective teachers from public schools situated in the Poblacion barangays of Maydolong, Eastern Samar such as as Camada Elementary School, Omawas Elementary School, Maybocog Elementary School, Maydolong Central Elementary School, and Campakirit Elementary School. These centrally located schools were selected because they represent the main hubs of educational activity in the municipality and have well-established kindergarten programs. A total enumeration method was employed to ensure that all population is included as a sample across the participating schools. From the five public schools located within the Poblacion area, a total of 137 kindergarten learners were included. Alongside the learners, the kindergarten teachers handling these classes also included as respondents. Their involvement was essential in providing detailed information regarding the play-based learning strategies implemented in their classrooms, as well as their observations on children's early literacy development. The study deliberately excluded parents, district personnel, and learners from schools outside the Poblacion barangays. This delimitation ensured that the research remain focus, manageable, and context-specific to the educational environment where the implementation of play-based learning is most observable and consistent.

Table 1. Number of Respondents

SCHOOL	NUMBER OF STUDENTRE-SPONDENTS	NUMBER OF TEACHER RE-SPONDENTS	TOTAL
Camada Elementary School	25	1	26
Omawas Elementary School	17	1	18
Maybocog Elementary School	30	1	31
Maydolong Central Elementary School	50	2	52
Campakirit Elementary School	15	1	16
TOTAL	137	6	143

Research Instruments

The study utilized two primary research instruments to gather data on play-based learning strategies and early literacy development among kindergarten learners in the Poblacion barangays of Maydolong. First, a Teacher Questionnaire on Play-Based Learning was administered to kindergarten teachers. This structured questionnaire was designed to collect information on the types, frequency, and instructional methods of play-based learning strategies that were implemented in their classrooms. The instrument covered guided play, free play, story-based play, and activity-based learning. Its content underwent expert validation to ensure that the items are comprehensive, appropriate, and aligned with classroom practices. Second, an Early Literacy Assessment Checklist for Learners was used to evaluate children's foundational literacy skills. This instrument was adapted from the Department of Education's K–12 Kindergarten Curriculum Guide and Literacy Standards (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016). The checklist assessed learners across four key literacy domains: Phonemic Awareness, or the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds; Vocabulary Development, referring to the understanding and use of new words; Print Awareness, including recognition of letters, words, and basic print conventions; and Oral Language Skills, such as speaking, comprehension, and story retelling.

Data Gathering

The data collection for this study followed a systematic process to ensure accuracy, ethical practice, and smooth implementation. To begin, formal communication was made with the Department of Education (DepEd) district office and the principals of the targeted public schools in the Poblacion barangays of Maydolong. Permission to conduct the study was secured through written requests and coordination meetings. Once approval is granted, the researchers conducted an orientation with the participating kindergarten teachers and, when appropriate, with the learners. During this orientation, the purpose and scope of the study was explained, and participants were assured that their involvement were voluntary and that all information were treated with strict confidentiality. Following the orientation, the research instruments were administered.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

Kindergarten teachers were asked to accomplish the questionnaire on playbased learning practices, while learners were individually assessed using the Early Literacy Assessment Checklist. These assessments were conducted during regular class hours to minimize disruption to instructional activities and to observe learners in their natural learning environment. After data collection, the responses and assessment results were reviewed for completeness, accuracy, and consistency. Any missing or unclear entries were verified before the data are encoded for statistical analysis.

Throughout the entire process, ethical considerations were strictly observed. Informed consent was secured from teachers, and parental consent were obtained for all participating learners. All data were handled responsibly to ensure confidentiality and protect the rights and welfare of the respondents.

Analysis of Data

The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the collected data, consistent with its descriptive-correlational research design.

For the first statement of the problem, which aimed to determine the level of implementation of play-based learning strategies, the study utilized descriptive statistics, particularly the weighted mean, to analyze the responses of kindergarten teachers. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were also applied to organize the data systematically. The computed means were interpreted using a five-point scale ranging from very low to very high to clearly describe the extent to which guided play, free play, story-based play, and activity-based learning were implemented in the classroom.

For the second statement of the problem, which focused on assessing the level of early literacy development of learners in terms of phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, print awareness, and oral language skills, descriptive statistical tools were likewise employed. The weighted mean was used to measure learners' performance in each literacy domain based on the Early Literacy Assessment Checklist. The results were then categorized using the same interpretative scale to determine whether learners demonstrated very high, high, moderate, low, or very low levels of literacy development.

For the third statement of the problem, which examined the relationship between the extent of play-based learning implementation and early literacy development, the study applied the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r). This inferential statistical method was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variable (play-based learning) and the dependent variable (early literacy development). A 0.05 level of significance was set as the basis for hypothesis testing, and the computed p-value was compared against this threshold to determine whether the relationship was statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical standards in conducting research involving human participants, particularly young learners. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the Department of Education (DepEd) authorities and school administrators of the selected public elementary schools in Maydolong, Eastern Samar. Coordination with school heads ensured that the research procedures aligned with institutional policies and did not disrupt regular classroom activities.

Informed consent was secured from all participating kindergarten teachers, and parental consent was obtained for the learners involved in the study. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the research, as well as their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences. This ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and based on full understanding of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The identities of the teachers and learners were not disclosed in any part of the study, and all collected data were treated with utmost privacy. Data were used solely for academic purposes and were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

Furthermore, the study ensured that no harm—physical, psychological, or emotional—was inflicted on the participants. Data collection was conducted during regular class hours in a natural classroom setting to avoid disruption or discomfort. The assessment procedures were designed to be age-appropriate, non-invasive, and respectful of the learners' developmental stage.

Overall, the study upheld the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, ensuring that the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants were protected throughout the research process.

RESULTS

LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING STRATEGIES IN KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS IN MAYDOLONG

Table 3 presents the Level of Implementation of Play-Based Learning Strategies in Kindergarten Classrooms in Maydolong**,** with an overall grand mean of 4.45 (Very High)**.** This indicates that teachers consistently apply playbased strategies in their daily teaching practices. In simple terms, this means that play is not just used occasionally, but is a regular and important part of how children learn in these classrooms.

Looking at Guided Play**,** all indicators received very high ratings (means ranging from 4.6 to 5.0)**.** Teachers strongly implement structured play, give guidance through questions, set clear learning goals, and closely observe learners. The perfect score (5.0) for observing learners suggests that teachers are very attentive to children's development during play. This finding supports the study of Weisberg et al. (2016)**,** which explains that guided play—where teachers provide direction while allowing children to explore—leads to better learning outcomes compared to unstructured or purely teacher-directed methods. Similarly, Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) emphasized that guided play helps children develop language, problem-solving, and social skills because it balances structure and freedom.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

In Free Play, the results are slightly lower but still high (means from 3.6 to 5.0). Teachers ensure safety (5.0) and provide time for free play, but giving children full choice and providing varied materials received relatively lower means. This suggests that while free play is practiced, it may still be somewhat controlled or limited. According to Frost (2010), free play is essential because it allows children to express creativity, independence, and imagination. Meanwhile, Ginsburg (2007) noted that giving children enough time and freedom for play supports emotional well-being and reduces stress, which is important for young learners.

For Story-Based Play, the implementation is generally high to very high (means from 3.6 to 4.6). Teachers actively integrate stories and engage learners in discussions, but dramatization and role-playing scored lower. This implies that while storytelling is present, opportunities for creative expression through acting may be less emphasized. This aligns with Isbell et al. (2004), who found that storytelling and story dramatization enhance children's vocabulary, comprehension, and imagination. Encouraging more role-play could further strengthen these skills.

In Activity-Based Learning, all indicators obtained very high ratings (4.8), showing strong implementation of hands-on and experiential learning. Teachers consistently provide activities that involve problem-solving, critical thinking, and real-life connections, while also adapting tasks to different learner abilities. This supports Piaget's constructivist theory (1952), which explains that children learn best by actively engaging with their environment. In addition, Kolb (1984) highlighted that learning through experience helps learners understand concepts more deeply and meaningfully.

Overall, the findings show that teachers in Maydolong are highly committed to using play-based learning strategies, especially in guided and activity-based approaches. However, there is room for improvement in expanding free play opportunities and encouraging more creative expression in story-based play. These results confirm existing literature that emphasizes the importance of play as a powerful tool for holistic development—supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth.

Table 3 Level of Implementation of Play-based Learning Strategies in Kindergarten Classrooms in Maydolong

	MEAN	SD	INTERPRETATION
Section 1: Guided Play			
1. I prepare structured play activities aligned with learning competencies.	4.6	0.55	Very High
2. I provide prompts or questions to guide children during play.	4.8	0.45	Very High
3. I set learning goals before conducting guided play activities.	4.6	0.89	Very High
4. I observe learners during guided play to assess their progress.	5.0	0.00	Very High
Section 2: Free Play			
1. I allot daily time for free play in the classroom schedule.	4.0	0.71	High
2. I provide various materials (blocks, toys, art tools) that encourage exploration.	3.8	0.45	High
3. I allow learners to choose the type of play they want to engage in.	3.6	0.55	High
4. I supervise learners during free play to ensure safety and cooperation.	5.0	0.00	Very High
Section 3: Story-Based Play 1. I integrate stories into classroom play activities.	4.4	0.89	High
2. I encourage children to dramatize orrole-play characters from stories.	3.6	1.14	High
3. I use puppets, props, or visuals to enhance story-based play.	4.0	0.71	High
4. I engage learners in conversations about the story before and after play.	4.6	0.89	Very High
Section 4: Activity-Based Learning 1. I provide hands-on learning activities (building, sorting, creating, etc.).	4.8	0.45	Very High
2. I design activities that require problem-solving and critical thinking.	4.8	0.45	Very High
3. I relate activity-based tasks to real-life experiences of learners.	4.8	0.45	Very High
4. I adapt activity-based tasks to the diverse abilities of children.	4.8	0.45	Very High
GRAND MEAN	**4.45**	**0.56**	**Very High**

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

LEVEL OF EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF KINDERGARTEN LEARNERS

Table 4 presents the Level of Early Literacy Development of Kindergarten Learners**,** with a grand mean of 2.17 (Low). This indicates that, overall, the learners are still developing foundational literacy skills and have not yet reached the expected level for their stage. In simple terms, many children are still learning the basics of language, sounds, and reading, and they need more support and practice.

In Phonemic Awareness, all indicators fall under low to very low (means from 1.45 to 2.11)**,** with the lowest score in segmenting words into individual sounds (1.45). This suggests that learners are struggling to hear and manipulate sounds in words, which is a key skill for reading. According to National Reading Panel (2000)**,** phonemic awareness is one of the most important predictors of reading success, as children must first understand sounds before they can read words. Similarly, Adams (1990) emphasized that difficulty in sound recognition can delay reading development, which explains the low performance in this area.

For Vocabulary Development**,** all indicators are consistently low (means from 2.23 to 2.50)**.** Learners have limited understanding and use of basic words, including naming objects and using new vocabulary from stories. This implies that children may not be exposed enough to rich language experiences. Supporting this, Hart and Risley (1995) found that children who are exposed to more words and conversations develop stronger vocabulary skills. Additionally, Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) highlighted that vocabulary grows through meaningful interaction, storytelling, and repeated exposure to new words.

In terms of Print Awareness**,** results are also low (means from 2.05 to 2.18)**.** Learners have difficulty recognizing letters, identifying their names, and understanding how print works (such as reading direction). This indicates that children are still unfamiliar with basic reading concepts. According to Clay (2001)**,** print awareness is essential because it helps children understand that print carries meaning. Without this foundation, reading becomes more difficult to develop.

Lastly, Oral Language Skills are rated low (means from 2.37 to 2.47)**.** Learners show limited ability to speak in complete sentences, answer questions, retell stories, and participate in discussions. This suggests that children may not be getting enough opportunities to express themselves verbally. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that language develops through social interaction, meaning children need active communication with teachers and peers. Furthermore, Dickinson and Tabors (2001) explained that strong oral language skills are closely linked to later reading success.

Overall, the findings show that early literacy development among kindergarten learners in Maydolong is still at a low level across all areas**,** especially in phonemic awareness. This is concerning because early literacy skills are the foundation for future academic success. The results affirm existing literature that emphasizes the importance of early exposure to language, interactive learning, and supportive teaching strategies. Despite the very high implementation of play-based learning (Table 3)**,** these results suggest that such strategies may need to be more intentionally focused on literacy development to effectively improve learners' skills.

Table 4. Level of Early Literacy Development of Kindergarten Learners

	MEAN	SD	INTERPRETATION
Section 1: Phonemic Awareness			
1. Recognizes and produces rhyming words.	1.84	1.04	Low
2. Identifies beginning sounds in familiar words.	2.11	0.94	Low
3. Blends simple sounds to form words.	1.76	1.04	Low
4. Segments spoken words into individual sounds.	1.45	1.05	Very Low
Section 2: Vocabulary Development			
1. Understands basic and frequently used classroom words.	2.50	0.77	Low
2. Names common objects, places, and persons.	2.45	0.79	Low
3. Uses new vocabulary learned from activities or stories.	2.27	0.81	Low
4. Understands simple descriptive words (big, small, fast, slow).	2.23	0.82	Low
Section 3: Print Awareness			
1. Recognizes letters of the alphabet.	2.16	0.92	Low
2. Identifies their own name in print.	2.05	0.96	Low
3. Demonstrates left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading direction.	2.18	0.93	Low
4. Distinguishes between letters and words.	2.12	0.92	Low
Section 4: Oral Language Skills			

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

1. Speaks in simple complete sentences.	2.43	0.83	Low
2. Understands and responds to questions appropriately.	2.39	0.83	Low
3. Retells simple stories with beginning, middle, and end.	2.47	0.80	Low
4. Participates in conversations and classroom discussions.	2.37	0.89	Low
GRAND MEAN	**2.17**	**0.90**	**Low**

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EXTENT OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION AND LEARNERS' EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Table 5 presents the relationship between the extent of play-based learning implementation and learners' early literacy development. The computed Pearson r value of −0.346 indicates a weak negative relationship, while the p-value of 0.501 is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the decision is to fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0), meaning that there is no significant relationship between the two variables.

In simple terms, even if teachers are highly implementing play-based learning strategies (as seen in Table 3), this does not automatically lead to higher early literacy development among learners (as shown in Table 4). The negative correlation, although weak, suggests that higher implementation of play-based learning does not necessarily correspond to better literacy outcomes in this context. However, since the result is not significant, this relationship is not strong enough to draw a definite conclusion.

This finding may seem surprising, especially since many studies support play-based learning as effective for literacy development. For instance, HirshPasek et al. (2009) argued that play-based learning enhances language and literacy skills when it is meaningful and guided. Similarly, Weisberg et al. (2016) emphasized that guided play, rather than free or unstructured play alone, is more effective in promoting academic outcomes such as literacy. This suggests that while play is being implemented at a very high level, it may not always be intentionally focused on literacy skills, which could explain the lack of significant relationship.

Moreover, Han et al. (2010) found that the effectiveness of play-based learning depends on how well it is aligned with specific learning goals. If play activities are not directly connected to phonemic awareness, vocabulary, or reading skills, improvements in literacy may be limited. This aligns with the results in Table 4, where learners showed low levels of early literacy development, despite high implementation of play strategies.

Another possible explanation is the role of external factors. According to Hart and Risley (1995), children's literacy development is also influenced by home environment, language exposure, and socio-economic conditions. This means that even with effective classroom strategies, learners may still struggle if they lack support outside school.

Overall, the findings indicate that play-based learning alone is not enough to significantly improve early literacy development unless it is carefully designed, guided, and aligned with literacy objectives. Teachers may need to integrate more targeted literacy-focused activities within play, such as sound games, storytelling, and word recognition tasks. This supports the idea that the quality and purpose of play matter more than the quantity, reinforcing existing literature on effective early childhood education.

Table 5. Relationship between the Extent of Play-based Learning Implementation and Learners' early Literacy Development

Variables	Pearson *r*	*p*value	Decision	Significance
Play-Based Learning Implementation vs. Early Literacy Development	−0.346	0.501	Failed to Reject *H*0	Not Significant

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The study found that kindergarten teachers in Maydolong, Eastern Samar demonstrated a very high level of implementation of play-based learning strategies, particularly in guided play and activity-based learning, indicating strong adherence to developmentally appropriate teaching practices.
2. Despite the high implementation of play-based learning, the early literacy development of learners remained low across all domains—phonemic awareness, vocabulary, print awareness, and oral language—highlighting a gap between instructional practices and learner outcomes.
3. There was no significant relationship between play-based learning implementation and early literacy development, suggesting that play-based strategies, when not intentionally aligned with literacy objectives, may have limited impact on improving learners' literacy skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions that has been made, the following recommendations are being propose:

1. For Teachers should integrate explicit literacy objectives into play-based activities, such as incorporating phonemic awareness games, vocabulary-building

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

tasks, storytelling, and print recognition exercises within daily classroom play.

2. Schools and DepEd should provide professional development and training focused on designing and implementing intentional and guided play strategies that directly support early literacy competencies.
3. Parents and the community should be encouraged to support children's literacy development at home through reading, storytelling, and meaningful conversations, creating a more supportive language-rich environment beyond the classroom.

Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. The research was conducted objectively and independently, without any financial, personal, or professional influence that could have affected the design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the results.

Furthermore, the researchers have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or institution that could benefit directly from the findings of this study. All data were reported honestly and transparently, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research.

REFERENCES

1. *Bacunlay, R. F. (2024). Literacy development among kindergarten learners: Experiences in Banaybanay District. International Journal of Research in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2(4), 1–6.*
2. *Balinbin, I. C. (2025). Integrating the play-based instruction into curriculum: Its level of effectiveness in kindergarten education in 3T's public schools. Pantao Journal, 4(2), [pages].*
3. *Decenilla, C. E., & Quirap, E. A. (2023). Play-based approach and kindergarten literacy level. International Journal for Research Publications, 125(1), 879–886. https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001251520234946*
4. *De Jesus, G. B. (2025). Contextualized play-based learning intervention: Effects on the academic performance of kindergarten learners. International Journal of Science Academic Research, 6(2), 9363– 9368.*
5. *Dobles, E. B., & Marquez, M. F. (2025). The effect of play-based learning on phonemic awareness of kindergarten in teacher's perspective. Journal of Education, Learning, and Management, 2(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.69739/jelm.v2i1.228*
6. *Dela Cruz, E. L., & Barrios, R. T. (2023). Mahampang Kita: Play-friendly classroom practices of kindergarten teachers. Industry and Academic Research Review, 4(1), 296–304.*
7. *Gurrea, E. A., Pinili, L., Opingo, K. M., & Revalde, H. (2025). Digital play for early literacy: Advancing alphabet recognition. Research in Social Sciences, 8(5). https://doi.org/10.53935/2641-5305.v8i5.479*
8. *Lojero, M. T. (2025). Effectiveness of game-based learning in the language and literacy of kindergarten pupils in Balasi Elementary School. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 51(5), 897–911. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i51969*
9. *Mariano, J. P. (2025). Developing kindergarten learners' phonemic awareness through contextualized play-based activities. International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science. https://doi.org/10.56726/IRJMETS69308*
10. *Marcelo, J. O. (2025). Development and validation of game-based learning (GBL) in kindergarten. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 7(3).*
11. *Santos, J. M. F. (2025). Development of AlpaLit for improving language literacy skills of kindergarten pupils. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000399*
12. *Tipan, D. B. (2025). From compliance to play: Enhancement of phonemic awareness through play-based learning activities in kindergarten.*
13. *Education Reform and Development, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.26689/erd.v5i1.5389*
14. *Ugalde, A. B., Manginga, A. M. G., Wayet, K. D., Osed, G. F., & Pastor, V. T. (2024). Exploring the efficacy of play-based approaches for enhancing numeracy instruction: A literature review. Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 4(3), 273–283.*
15. *Yan, L. B. (2018). Play-to-read in 30 days: Helping readers at-risk within the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. International Journal of Learning and Teaching, 4(1), [pp.].*
16. *Bacunlay, R. F. (2024). Literacy development among kindergarten learners: Experiences in Banaybanay District. International Journal of Research in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2(4), 1–6.*
17. *Colinares, C., & Derasin, L. M. C. (2023). The effects of play-based literacy on the reading readiness of Grade One students. International Journal of Science and Management Studies, 6(3), 224–229. https://doi.org/10.51386/25815946/ijsms-v6i3p120*
18. *Decenilla, C. E., & Quirap, E. A. (2023). Play-based approach and kindergarten literacy level. International Journal for Research Publications, 125(1), 879–886. https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001251520234946*
19. *Dela Cruz, E. L., & Barrios, R. T. (2023). Mahampang Kita: Play-friendly classroom practices of kindergarten teachers. Industry and Academic Research Review, 4(1), 296–304.*
20. *Dobles, E. B., & Marquez, M. F. (2025). The effect of play-based learning on phonemic awareness of kindergarten in teacher's perspective. Journal of Education, Learning, and Management, 2(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.69739/jelm.v2i1.228*
21. *Florita, D. N., & Sabud, M. C. (2023). A phenomenological account of early childhood education teachers in implementing play-based learning. European Journal of Education Studies, 10(4). https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i4.6142*
22. *Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Berk, L. E., & Singer, D. (2015). A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Applying the scientific evidence. Oxford University Press.*
23. *Imperial, J. M., & Ong, E. (2021). Application of lexical features towards improvement of Filipino readability identification of children's literature. arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2101.10537*
24. *Lojero, M. T. (2025). Effectiveness of game-based learning in the language and literacy of kindergarten pupils in Balasi Elementary School. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 51(5), 897–911. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i51969*
25. *Piaget, J. (1962). Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood (C. Gattegno & F. M. Hodgson, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1945)*
26. *Santos, J. M. F. (2025). Development of AlpaLit for improving language literacy skills of kindergarten pupils. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000399*

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

27. *Ugalde, A. B., Manginga, A. M. G., Wayet, K. D., Osed, G. F., & Pastor, V. T. (2024). Exploring the efficacy of play-based approaches for enhancing numeracy instruction: A literature review. Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 4(3), 273–283.*
28. *Urado, N., & Marquez, M. F. (2025). The effects of play-based learning in behavior and academic progress in kindergarten classrooms. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 11(8). https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23769*
29. *Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Harvard University Press.*

Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License