



Learning through play is a creative approach to reading development: Literature review

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore elementary English teachers' perceptions of Play-Based Learning and Sustained Silent Reading as strategies for enhancing elementary learners' reading skills. A thorough review of relevant literature and educational theories was conducted to establish a foundational understanding of these instructional approaches and their potential impact on reading development. Findings reveal that both Play-Based Learning and Sustained Silent Reading significantly promote learner engagement, facilitate language acquisition, and improve reading fluency among elementary students. Based on these results, the study recommends integrating creative and interactive teaching strategies to enhance reading skills among elementary learners effectively.

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Introduction

Reading is a critical skill that underpins both academic success and personal growth. It enhances vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and supports learning across disciplines. As learners advance through school, fluent and meaningful reading becomes essential not only for language mastery but also for fostering lifelong learning habits. Research shows that early reading difficulties, if left unaddressed, often lead to persistent academic challenges and diminished self-confidence (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Mayer & Fiorella, 2022).

However, based on the researcher's observations, many elementary students struggle with reading aloud and identifying main ideas, which leads to decreased engagement and confidence during English lessons. Traditional reading instruction methods, often passive and repetitive, may contribute to these issues by

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failing to engage diverse learning styles or support learners with low reading confidence (Roskos & Christie, 2020; Ulum, 2021).

Emerging studies advocate for play-based learning and sustained silent reading as effective alternatives. In the Philippine context, for example, learners engaged in structured play-based reading activities demonstrated significantly better reading performance than those in conventional classrooms (Philippine Journal of Education, 2023). The use of play-based techniques to improve engagement in literacy practices, such as Sustained Silent Reading, is gaining popularity. Despite their small number, research has demonstrated that reading combined with engaging activities, such as storytelling stations, book-based games, or dramatizations, can improve comprehension and inspire reluctant readers (Neuman & Roskos, 2007).

Reading becomes more imaginative and social as a result of this integration, thereby promoting active engagement. According to Miller and Almon (2009), play environments rich in literacy offer more genuine and significant learning opportunities.

As supported by Bodrova & Leong (2007), flexible curriculum policies, administrative support, and professional development are necessary for teachers to combine these approaches. Research indicates that educators are more inclined to try playful, student-centered literacy strategies when they feel empowered and supported.

Research from global publishers such as Taylor & Francis and Routledge (Luebbe, 2024) further confirms that interactive, game-like reading tasks improve comprehension and fluency more than standard approaches.

As Wood (2013) stated, the teaching strategy known as "play-based learning" makes play a significant component of instruction. It is based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget and supports the notion that social connection and active engagement are the most significant ways for children to learn.

When learning a language, children can practice new vocabulary, communicate ideas, and engage in meaningful peer interaction through play. Pyle and Danniels (2017) discovered that play-based education develops basic literacy, enhances oral language proficiency, and stimulates creativity. When applied thoughtfully, it can enhance the dynamic nature of reading instruction and make it more responsive to pupils' developmental needs.

Despite this growing evidence, there remains a gap in understanding how elementary English teachers perceive and implement play-based learning and sustained silent reading in their classrooms, especially within diverse local settings. First, there is a shortage of Philippine-based, theoretically grounded research on play-based learning and sustained silent reading to enhance the reading skills of elementary learners. Second, teachers still struggle to motivate learners to read correctly. Third, teachers are still seeking interventions to help learners develop a love of reading. In fact, although play-based learning has many advantages, instructors frequently cite time constraints, curricular requirements, and the false

belief that play is not "real learning" as reasons for not utilizing it in organized school environments (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring teachers' perspectives on these approaches and examining their impact on elementary learners' reading skills. The findings aim to offer practical recommendations for developing more inclusive, engaging, and learner-centered reading instruction.

The present study includes an introduction, a statement of the problem, the methodology used, results, discussion, and a conclusion.

Statement of the problems

This study aims to explore elementary English teachers' perceptions of the use of Play-Based Learning and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as creative approaches to enhancing reading development. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do elementary English teachers perceive the effectiveness of play-based learning and does sustained silent reading improve learners' reading skills?
2. What instructional strategies do teachers employ to integrate play-based learning and sustained silent reading in their reading lessons?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing play-based learning and sustained silent reading in the classroom?

Methodology

The literature for this study was selected through a systematic search of scholarly databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and academic journal repositories, with a focus on publications from 2005 onwards. Search terms such as "play-based learning," "sustained silent reading," "reading development," and "elementary literacy" guided the identification of relevant sources.

To determine the most pertinent literature, the researchers applied inclusion criteria emphasizing recent empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and reviews that specifically address play-based learning and sustained silent reading as instructional strategies for reading development in elementary education. Priority was given to research that also examined teachers' perceptions and instructional practices, aligning with the study's qualitative focus.

This process resulted in the selection of eight key comparative literature sources. These works collectively provide a balanced overview of current findings, theoretical insights, and the contextual understanding necessary to frame the study and highlight existing knowledge gaps.

Results and discussion

The literature review examines English teachers' perceptions of the use of Play-Based Learning and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) to enhance elementary learners' reading skills. The literature review revealed four significant thematic findings aligned with the study's specific questions:

Thematic 1: Perceived effectiveness of play-based learning and SSR

The literature consistently emphasizes that both SSR and play-based learning are efficacious methods for enhancing reading development. Play-based learning was observed to engage students actively, promote language learning, and build reading confidence through the creation of purposeful, enjoyable literacy activities (Roskos & Christie, 2020; Smith & Pellegrini, 2021).

In the same way, SSR was identified to induce fluency in reading, vocabulary development, and positive attitudes towards reading by offering students extended practice opportunities and control over the reading materials (Johnson & Lee, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). These results imply that teachers will be more likely to view both strategies as practical tools for learner participation and reading performance.

Current research continues to support the significance of Play-Based Learning as a viable approach to developing early reading skills. Roskos and Christie (2020) highlight that play-based literacy experiences facilitate active participation, language growth, and understanding through the provision of sense-rich, meaning-filled learning situations.

In addition, as Smith and Pellegrini (2021) note, play-based learning can enhance vocabulary learning and reading motivation among elementary students.

On the other hand, Johnson and Lee (2021) stated that Sustained-Silent Reading Sessions can increase students' motivation to read more quickly and accurately. Nguyen et al. (2022) added that SSR promotes a positive attitude toward reading and is a helpful way to meet the needs of each learner, despite their unique learning styles and differences.

Play is not only a fundamental element of a developmentally appropriate curriculum but also the solution to the new central curriculum that teachers use to prepare their students for the evolving 21st century, Wohlwend (2008) contends.

Grown-ups need not disrupt, some researchers state. Children at play, but others argued that adults can teach children through play, including academic concepts and specific skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

Thematic 2: Instructional strategies for integrating play-based learning and SSR

Literature shows that teachers employ various creative strategies to implement these methods effectively. According to the Philippine Journal of Education (2023), play-based learning includes interactive activities such as storytelling, dramatization, and interactive reading to meet the diverse needs of learners and support their proper reading. Furthermore, Luebbe (2024) stated that educators provide SSR sessions to stimulate each learner's interest in reading texts.

Everybody knows that play is central to early literacy development. As Neuman and Roskos (2012) point out, play spaces with ample print and storytelling materials expose children to real-world environments where they can practice early reading skills. These include acquiring popular story structures, repeating narrative patterns, and trying out letter sounds.

This is supported by Bodrova and Leong (2007), who demonstrate that symbolic play directed towards a goal enhances language and cognitive development, particularly when teachers scaffold proximal development interactions.

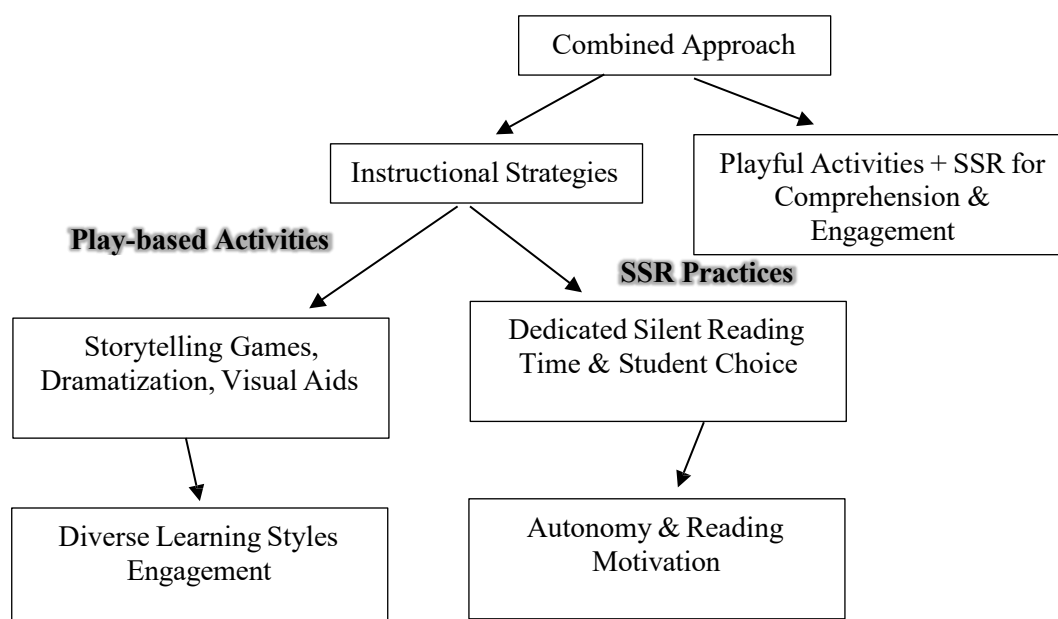
Research has shown that when learning is play- and choice-based, students are more motivated, even in their case.

Guthrie et al. (2021) emphasized that students' motivation to read will increase only if learners engage in interactive activities that encourage active participation in class discussions.

By the commonly held psychological perspective (Pui-Wah & Stimpson, 2004), for example, play is a function of one's temperament. Play is a child-directed, self-selected, and organically motivated activity (Goldstein, 2012). Children thus act naturally when they play, doing whatever they please at their own pace and in their own style (Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012).

Young children engage in intentional, teacher-directed, developmentally appropriate play that promotes specific learning goals through learning through play. Such child-directed and autonomous education can benefit young children's cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development and also provide them with greater autonomy to discover what they enjoy (Lugo-Gil & Dang, 2020).

Rushton, Juolaa-Rushton, and Larkin (2010) argued that play is an activity that encourages the development of sensory and neurotransmission systems and, from another angle, cognitive development.

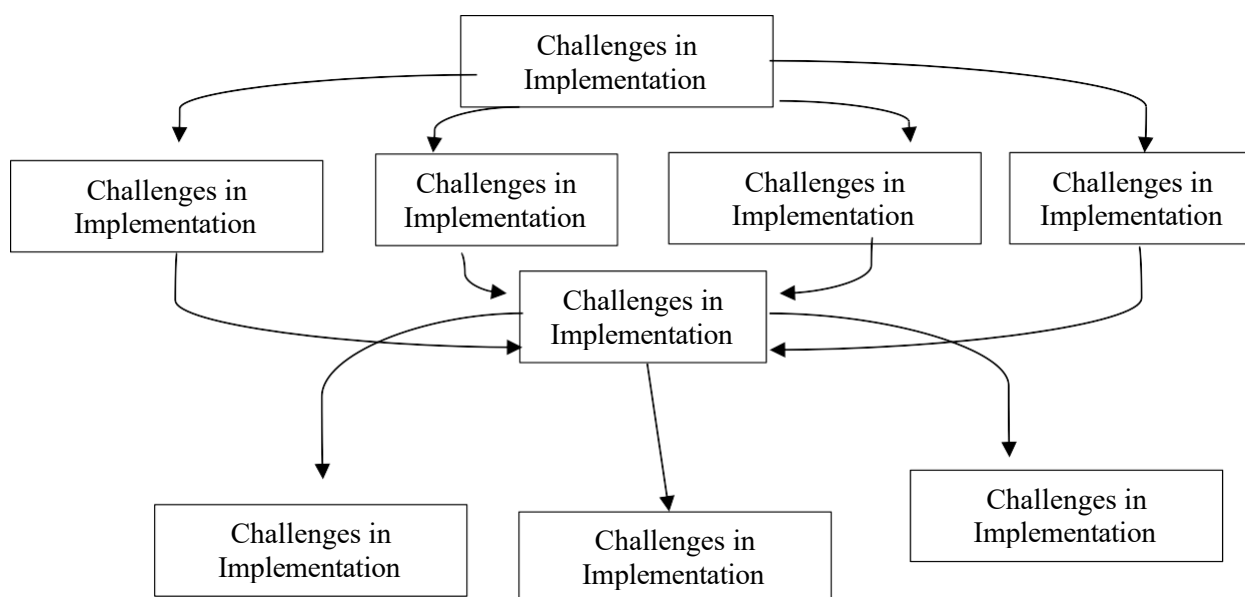


Visual 1: This flowchart shows the variety of creative strategies teachers use to implement Play-Based Learning and SSR. Play-based activities include storytelling games, dramatization, and visual aids that cater to diverse learning styles. SSR involves allocating dedicated silent reading time and encouraging student choice to foster autonomy and motivation. Combining these methods enhances comprehension and engagement. These strategies are supported by Frost et al. (2012), the Philippine Journal of Education (2023), and Luebbe (2024).

Thematic 3: Challenges in implementing play-based learning and SSR

Despite their benefits, the literature also reveals challenges teachers face when applying these methods. Time constraints, limited resources, and varying student reading abilities can hinder consistent implementation (Garcia & Santos, 2023; Tan & Lopez, 2024).

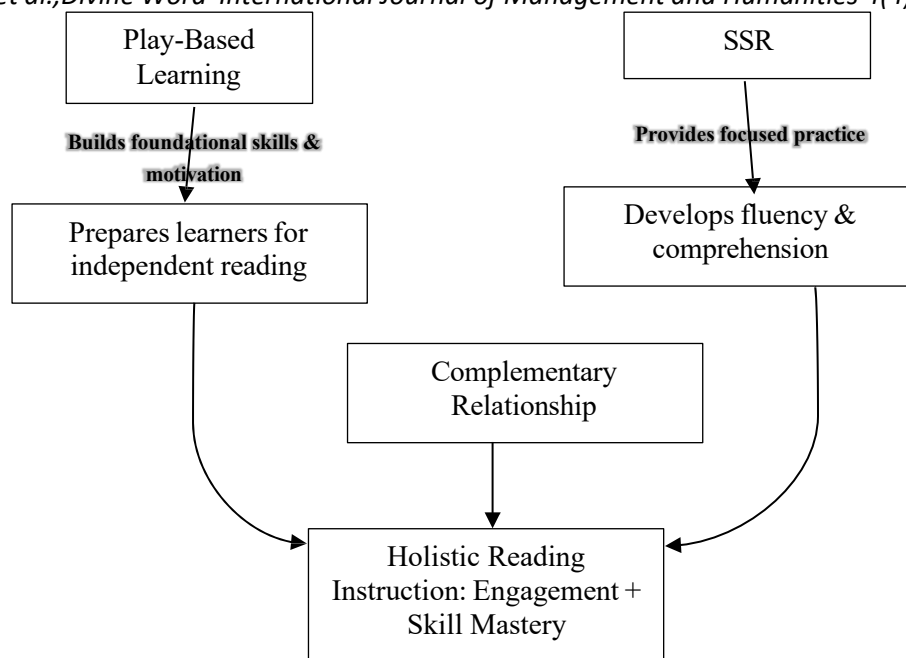
Additionally, some educators struggle to balance curriculum demands and find appropriate materials that maintain learner interest during SSR. These challenges highlight the need for ongoing teacher training, resource support, and contextual adaptation to maximize the effectiveness of these reading strategies.



Visual 2: This diagram highlights common challenges faced by teachers, including time constraints, limited resources, variability in student reading levels, and curriculum demands. It emphasizes the need for ongoing teacher training, resource support, and contextual adaptation to implement these reading strategies effectively. These challenges are noted by Garcia and Santos (2023) and Tan and Lopez (2024).

Thematic 4: Connection between play-based learning and SSR

The literature review shows a complementary relationship between play-based learning and sustained silent reading. Play-based learning helps learners build foundational skills and increases motivation, while SSR provides practice to help each learner comprehend and read correctly. (Philippine Journal of Education, 2023; Luebbe, 2024)



Visual 3: This flowchart depicts the synergy between Play-Based Learning and SSR. Play-based learning builds foundational skills and motivation, preparing learners cognitively and emotionally for independent reading. SSR provides the focused practice necessary for fluency and comprehension development. Together, they support a holistic approach to reading instruction that addresses both engagement and skill mastery, as supported by the Philippine Journal of Education (2023) and Luebbe (2024).

Conclusion

This study shows that elementary English teachers have positive perceptions of Play-Based Learning and Sustained Silent Reading as practical tools for enhancing each learner's reading skills. Both approaches were found to contribute meaningfully to learners' motivation, language acquisition, and reading fluency. However, challenges such as classroom noise and reading disparities persist.

To understand the benefits of Play-based Learning and Sustained-Silent Reading, it is essential to provide adequate resources and implement inclusive teaching strategies that support effective instruction. By addressing these challenges and implementing improvements, educators can create a more engaging, supportive environment that supports each learner's reading development.

As reported by the Philippine Journal of Education (2023), there is a 50-20 % improvement among elementary learners who participated in an integrated play-based reading activity and silent reading in reading comprehension and fluency. Additionally, Luebbe (2024) added that interactive, game-like tasks with SSR can foster deeper comprehension and engagement.

As Pyle et al. (2018) had stated, it is crucial to take into account instructors' implicit beliefs about the conceptual compatibility of play and learning as well as their acceptance of general pedagogical

flexibility and variation. They distinguish between two teacher groups: one that incorporated a range of play forms and the other that mainly employed unstructured play in the classroom.

Therefore, it is essential to use reading strategies that increase students' motivation to read. As Guthrie et al. emphasized, students become more interested and persevere when they can choose the reading resources they want to use and engage in creative, fun activities.

Children can see reading as fun rather than a chore when games, interactive read-aloud, and themed reading areas are used. Character-themed reading days, reading tents, and adjustable seating all help to create classroom environments that encourage students to love reading, according to the Philippine Journal of Education (2023).

The review shows that play-based learning and sustained silent reading can truly enhance reading skills among elementary learners.

The review affirms that learning through play is an effective reading strategy that offers opportunities for students' growth and development, especially in reading. Therefore, future researchers should explore more impacts of Play-Based Learning and Sustained-Silent Reading.

In conclusion, Learning Through Play offers a holistic pathway to improve students' motivation and growth, as it is an innovative method grounded in evidence-based motivational strategies. By fostering engaged and capable readers, this theory-driven, culturally appropriate method has great potential to improve educational equity and performance in the Philippines.

To overcome reading difficulties, communities, educators, and policymakers must work together. Teachers must participate in seminars or training to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in teaching students to read correctly.

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