International Journal of Social Science and Human Research

ISSN (print): 2644-0679, ISSN (online): 2644-0695

Volume 09 Issue 02 February 2026

DOI: 10.47191/ijsshr/v9-i2-90, Impact factor- 8.007

Page No: 1688-1690

Enhancing Preschool Developmental Readiness Through Play-Integrated Constructivist New-Wave Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT: Early childhood education research continues to emphasize the importance of developmentally appropriate instruction in preparing learners for formal schooling. This study evaluated the effectiveness of a play-integrated constructivist new-wave pedagogical intervention in improving developmental readiness among preschool learners.

Using a quasi-experimental action research design, the study involved 23 preschool learners at Allang Elementary School, West District, Schools Division Office of Ligao. The intervention consisted of an eight-week structured play-based instructional module grounded on constructivist learning principles.

Results revealed statistically significant improvement in developmental readiness across cognitive, language, motor, and socio-emotional domains ($p < 0.05$). The intervention demonstrated strong practical significance as indicated by Cohen's d effect size analysis.

The findings provide empirical support for structured play-integrated pedagogy in public preschool education contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

Global early childhood education research underscores the role of early learning experiences in shaping long-term educational trajectories. Brain development studies suggest that the first six years of life represent a critical period for cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional network formation.

From a developmental systems perspective, learning emerges from the interaction of biological maturation, environmental stimulation, and social experience. Instructional strategies that promote multisensory engagement and exploratory learning are therefore essential.

Traditional preschool instruction in some public school contexts continues to rely on repetitive skill demonstration and teacher-directed activity sequencing. While such methods may support basic skill acquisition, they may not fully optimize learner curiosity, intrinsic motivation, and problem-solving development.

Play-integrated constructivist pedagogy represents a response to this instructional limitation. Play functions as a natural learning mechanism through which young children experiment, communicate, and internalize environmental patterns.

Although numerous international studies support play-based education, localized Philippine classroom implementation evidence remains limited. This study contributes context-specific empirical data on new-wave preschool pedagogy.

II. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

Constructivist Developmental Learning Theory

This study is grounded on constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed rather than transmitted.

Sociocultural Learning Mediation

Social interaction facilitates cognitive internalization processes. Teacher scaffolding enables learners to operate within their zone of proximal development.

Developmental Neuroscience Perspective

Early childhood learning experiences influence synaptic connectivity, neural pruning patterns, and executive function development. Rich sensory and social learning environments promote adaptive cognitive network formation.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest action research design was used. Although randomized controlled trials provide stronger causal inference, action research design was deemed appropriate due to ethical considerations involving preschool learners. The study acknowledges that the absence of a control group represents a methodological limitation but argues that within-subject comparison provides meaningful instructional impact evidence.

The participants of the study were 23 preschool learners enrolled at Allang Elementary School. The sample size is consistent with the natural classroom population of preschool settings, which are typically limited in number. Total enumeration sampling was employed to minimize selection bias and ensure that all available learners were included in the study. The use of within-subject statistical analysis further enhanced the sensitivity of the research design in detecting developmental changes over time. In terms of gender distribution, the participants were composed of 8 male and 15 female learners.

Intervention Fidelity Measures

To strengthen the credibility and internal validity of the study, intervention fidelity was strictly maintained throughout the implementation of the program. The instructional sessions followed a standardized daily structure to ensure consistency in teaching procedures. A teacher activity guide checklist was utilized to monitor the proper execution of learning activities. Each session was conducted within a controlled instructional duration of 30 to 40 minutes, and learning materials were presented in a systematic and regulated manner. Maintaining intervention fidelity is particularly important in action research since it helps ensure that observed learner improvements can be attributed to the designed instructional intervention rather than to variations in teaching delivery.

Instrumentation

The study utilized the Preschool Developmental Readiness Scale (PDRS), a researcher-developed assessment tool designed to measure four developmental domains, namely cognitive readiness, language development, motor coordination, and socio-emotional behavior. Content validity of the instrument was established through expert judgment using the Content Validity Index (CVI) computation. To ensure internal consistency, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with an acceptable reliability threshold set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$.

Statistical Treatment

Data collected in the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the developmental readiness levels of the preschool learners before and after the intervention. The paired sample t-test was employed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. In addition, Cohen's d was computed to measure the magnitude of the intervention effect size. Interpretation of statistical results followed established educational impact assessment standards.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that play-integrated constructivist new-wave pedagogy significantly improved preschool developmental readiness among the participants. The observed improvement across cognitive, language, motor, and socio-emotional domains provides empirical support for the effectiveness of structured experiential learning in early childhood education.

The statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores suggests that the intervention contributed positively to learner developmental growth. Beyond statistical significance, the computed effect size further indicates that the instructional strategy produced meaningful educational impact. In educational research, especially in classroom-based action research, practical significance is considered equally important as statistical significance because it reflects real-world instructional value.

The improvement in cognitive readiness may be attributed to the use of guided exploratory activities embedded within the intervention module. Play-based learning allows children to actively engage with learning materials, manipulate objects, and discover patterns through interaction. These processes are consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes knowledge construction through environmental interaction rather than passive reception of information.

Language development gains observed among the preschool learners may be explained by the incorporation of storytelling, questioning, and expressive play activities. Social interaction during play provides opportunities for vocabulary exposure, sentence formation practice, and communication confidence building. This finding aligns with sociocultural learning perspectives which highlight the role of mediated social experiences in language acquisition.

Socio-emotional development improvement is another important outcome of the intervention. Cooperative play activities encouraged sharing, turn-taking, and peer interaction. Early childhood research indicates that structured social play supports emotional regulation and prosocial behavior formation. In classroom settings, socio-emotional competence is strongly associated with future academic adjustment and positive school engagement.

Motor skill development also showed positive progression following the intervention. Activities involving drawing, tracing, movement games, and manipulative tasks contributed to the refinement of both gross and fine motor coordination. Developmental neuroscience literature suggests that repeated sensorimotor engagement supports neural pathway strengthening during early childhood developmental stages.

The success of the intervention may also be linked to instructional fidelity monitoring implemented during the study. Maintaining consistent session duration, structured activity sequencing, and standardized material presentation likely enhanced the reliability of instructional delivery. Intervention fidelity is a critical component in educational action research because it ensures that observed effects are attributable to the designed program rather than instructional variability.

Although the study utilized a small sample size, the methodological approach remains appropriate for classroom-based action research. Preschool classrooms typically accommodate limited learner populations, making total enumeration sampling a practical strategy. Moreover, within-subject pretest–posttest analysis increases sensitivity in detecting developmental change over time.

The results of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting new-wave pedagogy in early childhood education. Structured play-based instruction provides a learning environment that balances child autonomy and teacher guidance. This balance is essential in optimizing young learners' curiosity-driven exploration while maintaining instructional direction.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that preschool teachers can enhance learner developmental outcomes by integrating structured play modules into daily instruction. School administrators may consider supporting teacher training programs focused on developmentally appropriate practice and innovative early childhood instructional design.

V. EDUCATIONAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study supports the institutionalization of structured play-based pedagogy in early childhood classrooms.

School leaders should invest in professional development programs focusing on new-wave early childhood instructional design.

Education policymakers may consider integrating structured play modules into preschool curriculum implementation guidelines.

VI. CONCLUSION

Play-integrated constructivist new-wave pedagogy is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing preschool developmental readiness.

The intervention demonstrates both statistical and practical educational significance.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is limited by its single-group design and classroom-based sample.

Future research may explore multi-site randomized implementation and longitudinal developmental tracking.

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