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INCREASING KINDERGARTNERS' ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES (PBA)

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The author May Flor C. Rivera has been removed due to submitting multiple articles and subsequently ignoring all communication after acceptance. A statement on the matter is expected from Mariano Marcos State University and the Department of Education (DepEd).

Abstract:
Numerous studies have shown the benefits of play-based activities across various academic areas. Although play-based activities (PBA) have been used in different studies, they have not been extensively applied in kindergarten settings during the blocks of time. Therefore, this study was conducted to increase the engagement of kindergartners using PBA. Due to anticipated factors such as remaining quiet or not engaging in meeting activities, being too shy to interact or communicate with classmates and teachers, and being uninterested and unmotivated in activities, we designed an intervention to enhance kindergartners' engagement. The data were obtained from 36 kindergartners. Pre-observation was conducted to determine the participants' level of engagement, followed by post-observation after implementing play-based activities (PBA). Mean and t-test were used to analyze the gathered data. Prior to the intervention, the participants were not engaged in the blocks of time. The findings revealed that PBA contributed to the improvement of the participants' engagement in the Blocks of Time. Consequently, the more participants were exposed to PBA, the higher the likelihood of their engagement in the blocks of time.

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1. Context and Rationale of The Study

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to the period from a child's birth until they enter kindergarten. Early childhood education encompasses the time between birth and eight years old, when a child's brain is highly influenced by the environment (Alvarado, 2018). This critical period requires a specialized educational approach to ensure that children acquire essential skills and foundational concepts that will benefit them later in life. Also, she emphasizes that this stage is crucial as it marks the beginning of children's interactions with others, including peers, teachers, and parents, and the development of lifelong interests.

Interaction plays a vital role in learning, as seen through the active engagement of learners. Learners can interact more effectively with their peers when they actively participate in discussions. This has a significant impact on early childhood classrooms and the learners themselves. As stated by Yoshikawa *et al.* (2013), children benefit the most when teachers engage in stimulating interactions that support learning and provide emotional support. Additionally, interaction can enhance the learning process and improve academic achievement. By encouraging discussions, learners can ask questions, discuss issues encountered in class, and foster higher-level critical thinking. The study of Farber (2016) emphasizes that classroom engagement contributes to a positive learning environment, promoting peer interaction, the use of classroom materials, and active learning. When students are engaged, misbehavior and off-task behaviors decrease.

One of the concerns in early childhood classrooms is the poor engagement and participation of kindergartners during various blocks of time or routines. Routines play a crucial role in organizing learner and teacher behavior, providing children with consistency, confidence, security, trust, and a sense of safety. However, based on our observations, there is a lack of engagement during specific routines. It was mentioned in the study of Hemmeter *et al.* (2008) that challenging behaviors during transitions may result from changes in the schedule structure, staff arrangements, lack of routine implementation, and the duration of transitions. We have noticed that some kindergartners hesitate to enter the room and experience separation anxiety during arrival time. During the work period, some struggle with low self-esteem and lack the confidence to engage in the teaching-learning process, which makes them uncomfortable interacting with others. Furthermore, during indoor/outdoor play, some kindergartners exhibit uneasiness, noise, noncompliance with instructions, and aggression, leading to disengagement, especially when someone gets hurt.

Originally, kindergarten was intended to be a place where young children could learn and grow in a natural and playful setting. The use of various play materials allowed children to experiment and learn about the world with minimal adult intervention. Incorporating play-based activities into the classroom offers numerous benefits, particularly for increasing kindergartners' engagement during the blocks of time. According to Myck-Wayne (2010), play-based, hands-on learning is the most appropriate practice for early childhood classrooms as it allows young children to grow academically and socially. Play enables children to learn conflict resolution, cooperative work, and the exploration of new ideas. In the study of Bodrova & Leong (2003), it is explained that play enhances learning by developing comprehension, attention span, curiosity, empathy, concentration, and group engagement. Therefore, play-based activities encourage both active and inactive kindergartners to think collaboratively and explore new concepts.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of play-based activities across various academic areas. As indicated by Lynch (2015), children from both low- and higher-income backgrounds benefit from play in the classroom, improving math, language, early reading, and social-emotional skills. Although Play-Based Activities (PBA) have been used in different studies, they have not been extensively applied in kindergarten settings during the blocks of time. There is a gap in the literature regarding the use of play-based activities throughout the blocks of time. Thus, this study aims to address this gap and determine the effectiveness of play-based activities as an intervention to increase kindergartners' engagement during the blocks of time, in addition to their application across academic areas.

Furthermore, Santos (2017) highlights the importance of teachers' different teaching strategies in promoting learners' active participation and performance. Teachers' approaches can facilitate the construction of new knowledge by learners, making the content more relevant and engaging.

In conclusion, this study seeks to increase kindergartners' engagement through the implementation of play-based activities. Based on our observations during field studies, improving kindergartners' engagement during the blocks of time emerged as a concern within the classroom. Thus, we developed an intervention focusing on play-based activities as they have shown potential in stimulating engagement and cooperative learning. By incorporating play-based activities, we aim to determine their effectiveness in enhancing kindergartners' engagement during the blocks of time.

2. The Intervention

This study utilized play-based activities (PBA), which are varied activities involving child-led and open-ended play that were integrated into the teaching-learning process. These activities not only aim to increase kindergartners' engagement but also contribute to the development in early childhood, including gross motor, fine motor, language, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The PBA were implemented in every block

of time, and an activity plan was prepared for five sessions, encompassing activities that target each developmental domain.

Firstly, to develop the kindergartners' gross and fine motor skills, activities such as "Skip, Skip, and Complete," "Green Light, Red Light," "Teacher Fred Says," "Fix and Tell," and "Hop and Sort" were integrated. These activities focused on improving eye-hand coordination, body awareness, balance, bilateral coordination, and other gross motor tasks.

Secondly, language and literacy skills were enhanced through activities like "Emotional Pass", "Pass the Cabbage", and "Pick-Sing," allowing kindergartners to articulate, modulate their voices, express themselves, and boost their confidence.

Thirdly, cognitive skills were promoted through activities like "Scavenger Hunt," "Cross the Lava", "Water Cup Race", and "Bring Me," encouraging kindergartners to recall their learning, problem-solve efficiently, and develop a sense of readiness while having fun.

Lastly, social and emotional skills were addressed through activities such as "Sponge Relay", "Emotional Pass", and "Emotional Cup", facilitating the improvement of emotional vocabulary, discussing different feelings, and normalizing the expression of emotions.

These play-based activities were implemented across various blocks of time, including arrival time, work period 1, indoor/outdoor play, and work period 2. Teacher-guided, play-based activities were employed to engage the kindergartners in each block of time. Prior to the start of each block, clear instructions and demonstrations were provided to the kindergartners to ensure their understanding of the activity. They were given the opportunity to try the activity before fully engaging in it. This approach aimed to encourage collaborative activities that promote social skills and build social support among the kindergartners, thereby increasing the likelihood of engagement and participation for all.

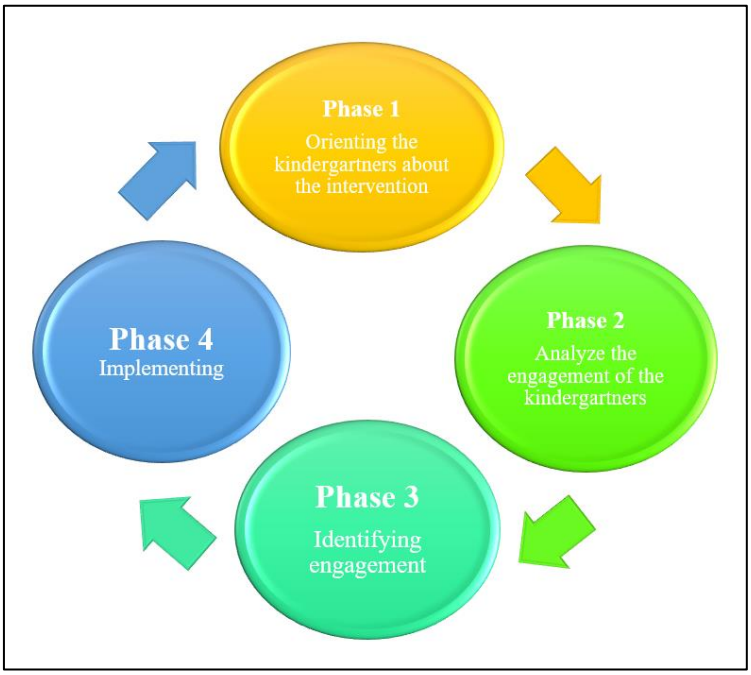

Figure 1: Play-Based Activity Cycle

PBA is an intervention to increase kindergartners' engagement. This intervention allows the kindergartners to engage in various teacher-guided play-based activities in various blocks of time. In implementing this intervention, these were the phases that need to be considered in order to successfully determine the effectiveness of the intervention in increasing kindergartners' engagement.

Implementation of PBA involves various phases used to determine the level of engagement of the kindergartners. Presented in Figure 1 are the phases that were used:

- **Phase I - Orienting the kindergartners about the intervention.** Before the start of every block of time, the kindergartners were instructed on the PBA that they would be engaging in. We also demonstrated how the activity should be done. Afterwards, we allowed the kindergartners to try the activity before fully participating. These steps were applied to every block of time.
- **Phase II - Analyzing the engagement of the kindergartners.** Prior to each activity, we analyzed the level of engagement among the kindergartners. We observed and took note of those who were actively engaged and those who were not.
- **Phase III - Identifying engagement.** Through observation using the researchers-made checklist, we identified the active and inactive kindergartners. After that, we focused on utilizing the PBA to encourage engagement among the inactive participants. The active kindergartners required minimal guidance during the activities.
- **Phase IV - Implementing.** In this phase, we provided assistance to the kindergartners during the PBA in each block of time. The activities were fully implemented and utilized in the different blocks of time.

3. Action Research Questions

This action research aimed to increase the kindergarteners' engagement through play-based activities. More so, it determined the effectiveness of PBA in enhancing the engagement level of the participants during different blocks of time.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1) What was the level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time before the implementation of PBA?
2) What is the level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time after the implementation of PBA?
3) Is there a significant difference in the level of engagement among kindergartners before and after their exposure to PBA?

4. Action Research Methods

This section presents the methods that describe the steps taken to achieve the result of the study. It includes the research design, research setting, research participants, research instrument, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

4.1 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. Descriptive because it determined the level of kindergartners' engagement before and after the intervention was conducted. On the other hand, correlational was employed to identify any significant differences in the engagement of kindergartners before and after the intervention.

4.2 Research Setting

This study was conducted in one of the Laboratory Schools in the Province of Ilocos Norte. The school is known for its academic excellence and for its performance in provincial, regional, and national contests. It was conducted during the 3rd quarter of the Academic Year 2022-2023. This school provided the ideal research setting for conducting the study as it was the place where we observed numerous kindergartners who exhibited poor engagement in various activities during different blocks of time. Conducting the study at this specific school allowed the researchers to gather significant information, different ideas, and distinct opinions based on real experiences, which were essential for the study.

4.3 Research Participants

The study involved 36 kindergartners from the morning session who were enrolled for the 2022-2023 academic year. Total enumeration was utilized to determine the participants who were observed on the designated day of classroom observation, and their level of engagement was recorded. Furthermore, information was gathered from

their adviser, who provided feedback and observations regarding the kindergartners' performances both before and after the intervention.

4.4 Research Instrument

This study utilized a 15-item researcher-made checklist with three (3) leading indicators:

a) class engagement,
b) behavioral engagement, and
c) listening engagement, each consisting of 5 sub-indicators.

It was content validated by three experts in the field of early childhood education and was rated "Highly Valid" with a mean score of 4.81. This rating indicates that the researcher-made checklist is suitable and developmentally appropriate for assessing the level of engagement in the activities involved in the study. The instrument employed a 4-point Likert scale to measure the participants' level of engagement, ranging from 1.0 as not engaged and 4.0 as highly engaged.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

To conduct this study formally, we initially obtained permission from the University Laboratory School Principal, with the endorsement of our CBAR adviser. We also informed the concerned adviser about the study. To ensure the engagement of the children, we obtained a consent form from the parents after explaining the purpose of the study.

The concerned adviser was informed to conduct pre-observation sessions. Thus, we prepared a checklist, which served as our research instrument, and developed play-based activities for the demonstration teaching. The intervention material was designed and then submitted for content and technical validity. The results of the validation indicated that the material was accurate for its purpose in the study and developmentally appropriate for the participants.

A pre-observation was conducted to assess the level of engagement of the participants during the blocks of time. We performed 5 demonstration teachings while utilizing Play-Based Activities (PBA) as instructional strategies. Post-observation was conducted after each scheduled demonstration teaching.

With the assistance of our statisticians and CBAR adviser, we presented the gathered data in tabular form and proceeded to analyze and interpret it.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In gathering the necessary data for this study, specific ethical considerations were strictly followed:

Participants considered for the study were fully informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, procedures, confidentiality, discomforts and risks, anticipated benefits, and grievance procedure.

Before conducting the study, the purpose of the research, which is to increase kindergartners' engagement through play-based activities, was explained to the parents of the kindergartners.

The engagement of the kindergartners in the study was purely voluntary, meaning their participation did not affect their relationship with the school or their academic performance in any way.

The researchers also clarified that the intervention would only consist of five (5) sessions and would be implemented during specific teaching and learning activities, such as discussions, group activities, and independent tasks.

To ensure confidentiality, the names of the kindergartners were not included in the discussion of the results. Furthermore, any pictures taken during the study were stored privately, and their faces were blurred.

The parents were assured that there was minimal risk involved for their child during the implementation of the intervention. However, it was emphasized that their child would benefit from participating in the study and contribute to the development of the teaching and learning process.

Lastly, the parents were informed about the grievance procedure. If they were dissatisfied with any aspect of the study, they were encouraged to address the school administration, either anonymously or directly. They were also provided with contact information to reach out to the researchers with any concerns.

4.7 Data Analysis

Below are the statistical tools used in the study:

1) Mean was utilized to determine the participants' engagement level before and after the use of Play-Based Activities (PBA) in the blocks of time.

Range of Means	Descriptive Interpretation
3.51 – 4.00 HE	Highly Engaged
2.51 – 3.00 ME	Moderately Engaged
1.51 – 2.00 SE	Slightly Engaged
1.00 – 1.50 NE	Not Engaged

2) A t-test was used to determine whether significant differences existed before and after the implementation of the intervention.

5. Discussion of Results

This section presents the results of the different methods of data collection related to evaluating the effectiveness of increasing kindergartners' engagement in the blocks of time through play-based activities. In-depth discussions of these results are presented in this chapter, which is primarily divided into three sections:

a) the level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time before the use of play-based activities,

b) the level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time after using the play-based activities, and
c) the level of engagement of kindergartners before and after they have been exposed to play-based activities.

5.1 The Level of Engagement of Kindergartners Before the Intervention

The following data presents the level of engagement of kindergartners in the blocks of time for five sessions. Towards the end of this section is the overall level of engagement of kindergartners before the intervention.

Based on the table below, the mean score of kindergartners' engagement in the blocks of time during arrival time was 1.32, indicating a level of "not engaged" engagement. For their Work Period 1, the mean score of their engagement was 1.44, also interpreted as "not engaged." The mean score of kindergartners' engagement in Indoor/Outdoor Play was 2.47, indicating a "slightly engaged" level of engagement. In their Work Period 2, they had a "slightly engaged" level of engagement with a mean score of 2.34. The overall mean score of kindergartners' engagement before the implementation of the strategy was 1.89, with a descriptive interpretation of "slightly engaged."

Table 1: The overall level of engagement of kindergartners in the blocks of time before the conduct of the intervention

Blocks of Time	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Arrival Time	1.32	NE - Not Engaged
Work Period 1	1.44	NE - Not Engaged
Indoor/Outdoor Play	2.47	SE - Slightly Engaged
Work Period 2	2.34	SE - Slightly Engaged
Overall	**1.89**	**SE - Slightly Engaged**

Legend:	
Range of Means	**Descriptive Interpretation**
3.51 - 4.00 HE	Highly Engaged
2.51 – 3.50 ME	Moderately Engaged
1.51 – 2.50 SE	Slightly Engaged
1.00 – 1.50 NE	Not Engaged

During the conducted pre-observation sessions, we observed and noted factors that may have affected kindergartners' engagement in the blocks of time. These factors include participants who remained quiet or did not engage in meeting activities, were too shy to interact or communicate with classmates and teachers, and showed disinterest and lack of motivation in doing activities. This observation conforms with the study conducted by Crozier and Alden (2001), who argued that shy children participate less in class and become anxious when they do. They also mentioned that shy students' anxiety leads to

reduced speaking and providing less meaningful information when they do participate. Furthermore, Coplan and Evans (2009) suggested that shy children's performance might be affected by their lack of engagement, specific use of language, or performance anxiety.

According to Buhs *et al.* (2006), children exhibiting aggressive or antisocial behaviors are more likely to be rejected by peers, which in turn is associated with lower classroom engagement and achievement. Disengaged students are at risk of various adverse academic and social outcomes. Most forms of disengagement, such as absence, disruptive behavior, and poor school connectedness, are linked to lower achievement, significantly impacting students' school experience (Hancock *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, O'Connor *et al.* (2017) assumed that low participation could be compensated by high cognitive and emotional engagement, whereas low cognitive engagement was expected to result in low achievement regardless of the extent of student participation and emotional engagement, as it was deemed not compensable.

5.2 The Level of Engagement of Kindergartners After the Intervention

Table 2 presents the current level of engagement of kindergartners in the blocks of time for five sessions. Towards the end of this section, the overall level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time after the intervention is presented.

Based on the table below, the mean score of the engagement of kindergartners in the Blocks of Time during Arrival Time was 3.44, indicating a level of "Moderately Engaged" engagement. For Work Period 1, kindergartners had a mean score of 3.56, interpreted as "Highly Engaged." The mean score of kindergartners' engagement during Indoor/Outdoor Play was 3.88, with a descriptive interpretation of "Highly Engaged." In Work Period 2, kindergartners had a mean score of 3.78, also interpreted as "Highly Engaged."

Table 2: The overall level of engagement of kindergartners in the blocks of time after the conduct of the intervention

Blocks of Time	**Mean**	**Descriptive Interpretation**
Arrival Time	3.44	ME - Moderately Engaged
Work Period 1	3.56	HE - Highly Engaged
Indoor/Outdoor Play	3.88	HE - Highly Engaged
Work Period 2	3.78	HE - Highly Engaged
Overall	**3.67**	**HE - Highly Engaged**

Legend:	
Range of Means	**Descriptive Interpretation**
3.51 - 4.00 HE	Highly Engaged
2.51 – 3.50 ME	Moderately Engaged
1.51 – 2.50 SE	Slightly Engaged
1.00 – 1.50 NE	Not Engaged

The overall mean score of kindergartners' engagement in the blocks of time after the implementation of the intervention was 3.67, with a descriptive interpretation of "Highly Engaged".

According to the findings, it was revealed that the participants' level of engagement improved after being exposed to the intervention, transitioning from slightly engaged to highly engaged. The overall mean score of the kindergartners indicated that play-based activities (PBA) have the potential to serve as an intervention for passive learners, boosting their engagement not only in the blocks of time but also across subject areas.

These results align with the statement made by Hunter and Walsh (2014), highlighting that play addresses crucial aspects of a child's development by enhancing critical thinking skills, engagement in activities, and socialization with peers and adults. Furthermore, Bodrova and Leong (2003) asserted that play promotes learning by fostering comprehension, attention span, curiosity, empathy, concentration, and group participation. Pyle *et al.* (2018) added that play enables children to learn cooperation and display socially appropriate behavior.

Supporting these ideas, Parker and Thomsen (2019) suggested that playful pedagogies can be more effective in cultivating social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and creative skills compared to "traditional" or "highly guided" pedagogical approaches commonly used in primary school classrooms. Additionally, Veiga *et al.* (2016) mentioned in their study that providing ample time for free play directly contributes to the development of social competence.

5.3 Difference Between the Level of Engagement of Kindergartners Before and After the Intervention

Table 3: t-Test showing the significant difference in the level of engagement before and after the intervention

	Before the Intervention	**After the Intervention**
Mean	1.89	3.67
Difference	1.78	
t-Value	3.18	
p-Value	*0.0031	

*Significance at 0.05 probability level

Table 3 presents the t-test, which demonstrates the significant difference in the level of engagement before and after the intervention. The analysis revealed highly significant differences after the participants were exposed to the use of play-based activities (PBA) as an intervention.

Overall, there is a mean difference of 1.78 before and after the implementation of the play-based activities (PBA) on the blocks of time in kindergarten. The computed t-value of 3.18 is higher than the tabulated t-value of 1.990 at a 0.05 significance level. Additionally, the p-value of 0.0031 is much smaller than the significant probability level

of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, indicating a significant difference between the level of engagement in the blocks of time of the participants. This means that play-based activities (PBA) are an effective intervention in increasing kindergartners' engagement in the Blocks of Time.

In parallel with the study of Dominguez *et al*. (2006), it was stated that when children engage in play, they participate in meaningful occupations and develop skills that will be used throughout their lives. Furthermore, Zapata (2020) argued that through play, children develop an understanding of social expectations and rules, and it provides opportunities to share thoughts and ideas, listen, and compromise. Therefore, play-based activities can also foster engagement, especially in the classroom, as part of the social expectations among children. In addition, Li (2022) also added that children learn to cooperate, follow rules, develop self-control, and generally get along with others by playing together.

6. Reflection

This research implemented an intervention called play-based activities (PBA) to increase Kindergartners' engagement in the Blocks of Time. The researchers conducted 5 sessions of pre-observation where the intervention was not yet implemented and another five sessions of post-observation where the intervention was used to determine if there were changes and significant differences in the engagement of the Kindergartners in the Blocks of Time.

Based on the study's findings during the pre-observation, it was observed that the kindergartners were not well-engaged in the blocks of time. Factors that affected their engagement were noted, including participants who remained quiet or did not engage in meeting activities, were too shy to interact or communicate with classmates and teachers, and showed disinterest and lack of motivation in activities.

On the other hand, the post-observation showed that the level of engagement of the kindergartners in the blocks of time improved after exposure to the intervention, transitioning from slightly engaged to highly engaged. Most of them actively engaged in the various blocks of time, and during the intervention, they exhibited eagerness and excitement in every activity. Some learners even requested more play-based activities to play with. Hence, using PBA proved effective as an intervention in increasing the Kindergartners' engagement.

Based on the study's overall results, it can be concluded that PBA contributes to the improvement of the participants' engagement in the Blocks of Time. Therefore, the more the participants are exposed to the use of PBA, the more likely they are to use it.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

1) Teachers should incorporate play-based activities (PBA) not only in the blocks of time used in kindergarten but also across other subject areas at the primary level.
2) School administrations should include the use of play-based activities (PBA) as one of the topics to be discussed during the conduct of In-Service Training (INSET) and Learning Action Cell (LAC) Sessions to promote and enhance its use.
3) The play-based approach, as an intervention, should be introduced in the early years, particularly for pre-service teachers pursuing Early Childhood Education.
4) Play-based Activities (PBA) should be included as a dedicated topic in the curriculum for early years within the Early Childhood Education course.
5) Future researchers should conduct similar studies to further validate the results obtained in this study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to the conduct, analysis, and dissemination of findings from the study titled "Increasing Kindergartners' Engagement Through Play-Based Activities (PBA)." This research was conducted solely to explore the impact of play-based activities on kindergartners' engagement during the blocks of time, with no external influence or bias affecting the study's design, data collection, interpretation, or reporting of results.

The authors affirm that no financial, professional, or personal relationships exist that could have influenced the study outcomes or created any perceived or actual conflict of interest. Furthermore, the intervention and methodologies used in this study were designed and implemented with the primary goal of enhancing young learners' engagement, ensuring that the results reflect genuine improvements observed among the participants.

All findings and interpretations presented in this study are based purely on the analyzed data, and no external entities, organizations, or individuals had any vested interest in influencing the results. The authors remain committed to maintaining transparency and academic integrity throughout the research process.

About the Author(s)

Mr. John Frederick R. Barut, Ms. Ivory Faith G. Agullana, Ms. Jovelyn C. Domingo, Ms. Dannika Marie C. Padilla, and Ms. Erika A. Tomas are graduates of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) program at the Mariano Marcos State University, College of Teacher Education (MMSU-CTE). Their academic training and field experiences have provided them with a strong foundation in early childhood education, focusing on child development, innovative instructional strategies, and play-based learning approaches. Their research interests include enhancing learner engagement and promoting active participation in early learning environments.

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The collective expertise of the authors ensures that their work contributes significantly to advancing knowledge and best practices in the field of early childhood education.

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