



Play-Based Learning in Rural Ethiopian Early Childhood Education: An Assessment of Curriculum Implementation

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Abstract

Play-based learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes children's active engagement in playful activities to support their cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. In rural Ethiopian early childhood education settings, there has been limited implementation of PBL despite its recognised benefits for young learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving a survey of 60 early childhood educators from randomly selected rural communities in Ethiopia. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 15 educators, supplemented by observations at two schools where PBL tools were used. The findings indicate that while 85% of the surveyed educators reported using some form of play-based learning materials, only 40% felt adequately trained in its application. A thematic analysis revealed a predominance of physical activity and storytelling as primary components of PBL implementation, with less emphasis on problem-solving scenarios. The study underscores the need for comprehensive professional development programmes to enhance educators' skills in implementing play-based learning effectively in rural Ethiopian settings. Rural early childhood education authorities should prioritise training initiatives that focus on integrating diverse PBL tools and strategies, particularly those promoting problem-solving and critical thinking. Additionally, ongoing support through mentorship or coaching models could facilitate smoother implementation of PBL practices. Play-based learning, Early Childhood Education, Rural Ethiopia, Educational Curriculum

Keywords: *Ethiopia, Geographical Indicators of Ethiopia, Anthropology of Education, Developmental Psychology, Child Development Theory, Early Childhood Education, Play Therapy*

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