

Integration of play-based learning into the instructional delivery of tutors and lecturers in Ghana

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Abstract

In this study, we explored the integration of play-based learning into the instructional delivery of tutors/lecturers in Ghana. Sixteen tutors/lecturers (12 males; 4 females) selected through homogenous sampling technique completed this current study. The findings indicated tutors/lecturers generally perceived play-based learning as an engaging and effective medium for teaching and learning. Tutors/lecturers affirmed play was crucial in motivating learners, fostering active participation, and connecting abstract ideas to real-world experiences. Relative to the application of play-based learning, tutors/lecturers had a preference for the guided approach. They primarily assumed a facilitator role during play-based learning and encouraged exploration, collaboration, and active learning. Limited use of play-based usage in assessment, classroom space constraints, time limitations, and large class sizes were some inhibitory factors impeding the application of play-based learning. Despite these challenges, tutors/lecturers recognize the potential of play-based learning to facilitate enjoyable, self-directed, and effective learning experiences and advocated for its broader adoption.

Keywords: Play-Based Learning, Instructional Delivery, Tutors, Lecturers, Ghana

Introduction

Ghana has made strides towards improving access to education. However, similar to other developing countries, several challenges still exist in the areas of teacher quality and learning outcomes. Traditional teaching methods that are typically teacher-centred and may promote rote learning (UNESCO, 2021) remain popular. Consequently, studies are arguing for the necessity of

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ensuring learners' critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity and for the deployment of more effective pedagogical approaches (Akyeampong et al., 2018), including play-based learning in Ghanaian schools.

LEGO Foundation and partners have concluded that play is educational when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive. Studies have shown that learning through play promotes the development of early literacy and numeracy skills in an integrated approach, while also cultivating children's social, emotional, physical, and creative skills (LEGO Foundation, 2017). In the context of inclusive education, play-based learning promotes inclusive education by creating an environment where all students, regardless of ability, can engage in meaningful learning experiences (Smith, 2020). Within inclusive education environments, play activities help learners with diverse needs to develop social skills and build relationships (Jones, 2019). Play-based learning affords educators the opportunity of differentiated instruction, allowing each student to explore concepts at their own pace and level of understanding (Brown, 2021). It also supports the development of emotional resilience and self-regulation, which are crucial for students with special educational needs (White, 2018). The aforementioned benefits of play-based learning are particularly relevant in the Ghanaian educational context. National reforms such as the Standards-Based Curriculum emphasize core competencies like problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity (NaCCA, 2019). In settings where foundational literacy and numeracy remain a challenge for many learners, play-based learning offers an integrated and engaging way to reinforce these skills through peer interaction in real-world contexts.

Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy highlights the need for flexible, child-centred teaching approaches that accommodate diverse learner needs (Ministry of Education, 2015). In overcrowded and resource-constrained classrooms such as those found in Ghana, play-based learning can offer cost-effective alternatives to traditional instruction (Anamuah-Mensah et al., 2020). Thus, play-based learning is not only developmentally appropriate but also pragmatically aligned with Ghana's educational priorities.

Play has often been characterized as child-initiated, with adults taking a largely passive supervisory role (Dockett, 2011; Flear, 2013, 2015). This view, rooted in developmentalist traditions, values child autonomy but has been criticized for neglecting the pedagogical potential

of adult guidance. Fleer (2015), while acknowledging the benefits of free play, also identifies the limitations of minimal adult involvement, particularly in structured learning environments. In contrast, Makaudze and Gudhlanga (2011) and Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) advocate for guided play, where adults intentionally scaffold children's play experiences to enhance learning outcomes. This divergence in perspectives reflects broader tensions in the literature about how best to balance autonomy and structure in play-based pedagogy. In the Ghanaian context, this debate takes on additional complexity. While policy and teacher training programmes increasingly endorse play-based learning, the implementation often mirrors Western models without critical adaptation (Abdulai, 2016). Guided play may offer a more culturally and practically relevant approach in Ghana due to large class sizes, rigid timetables, and limited resources. Unlike contexts where free play is institutionalized through flexible curricula and resourced environments, Ghanaian educators often must mediate between didactic traditions and emerging child-centered practices.

The use of play as a technique or approach to teaching and learning has a policy backing in Ghana. The New Standard-Based Curriculum ((NaCCA, 2019) emphasizes the role of play and games in lesson delivery. Also, the current and even the previous Curricula for Kindergarten (KG) are explicit on the use of play-based learning. Role play and the use of games in classes are critical features of creativity and innovation, which underpin teaching and learning at Basic 1 to Basic 6. The Education Strategic Plan [ESP] 2018-2030 has creativity not only as an objective but creativity is perceived as one of the four foundation skills (Ministry of Education, 2018).

While both the New Standard-Based Curriculum (2019) and the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) explicitly promote play, creativity, and experiential learning, there is limited evidence that these policy prescriptions have been fully translated into consistent practice. Within the Ghanaian context, research has shown that although play is emphasized in curriculum frameworks, its practical implementation is often constrained by a lack of teacher preparedness, large class sizes, rigid assessment regimes, and inadequate classroom infrastructure (Tamanja, 2021; Aryeetey & Entsua-Mensah, 2020). As a result, the use of play-based methods in Ghanaian classrooms is inconsistent, and many teachers revert to teacher-centred approaches due to pressure to meet syllabus demands and prepare students for high-stakes exams. Additionally, despite the growing global evidence supporting play-based learning and Ghana's own policy support, the

integration of play-based learning at the tertiary level remains underexplored and poorly understood. There is limited empirical data on how tutors and lecturers interpret, implement, and experience play-based learning, especially when preparing pre-service teachers across diverse subject areas. This disconnect between policy aspirations and actual practice in higher education presents a critical gap in both literature and implementation. This study therefore seeks to address the following question: How do tutors and lecturers in Ghanaian teacher education institutions understand and integrate play-based learning in their instructional delivery?

Right To Play is a global organization dedicated to protecting, educating, and empowering children through the power of play. It currently has collaboration with some tertiary teacher education institutions in Ghana with the aim of integrating play-based learning and development approaches into the curriculum and training of future educators and professionals. The partnership is particularly focused on enhancing the capacity of these institutions to incorporate experiential learning methodologies that foster critical thinking, creativity, and social skills among students. Additionally, the partnership supports research and advocacy efforts that highlight the importance of play in child development and education (Right To Play, 2020).

The current study is underpinned by the theory of constructivism, which emphasizes an individual's role in constructing knowledge (Piaget, 1970). Past experiences, training, and current beliefs of educators about learning shape their understanding of play-based learning and its subsequent integration into their instructional delivery. Constructivism is also consistent with play-based learning in which learners engage with the material and build understanding through exploration and experimentation. Constructivism highlights the importance of social interaction in learning. Play often involves collaboration, negotiation, and communication, all of which contribute to social learning.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

Two main reasons influenced the choice of phenomenology as research design for this current study. Firstly, the integration of play-based learning into higher education is relatively new concept, and as such phenomenology allowed tutors/lecturers recount their lived experiences as they navigate this new territory. Again, the design allowed for in-depth interviews, capturing the various nuances of play-based learning experienced by tutors and lecturers. The choice of

phenomenology enabled the researchers uncover how tutors perceive, interpret, and implement play-based learning within their instructional practices. Phenomenology focuses on the essence of participants' experiences. Thus, making it particularly appropriate for uncovering the subjective realities and contextual influences shaping the adoption of play-based learning in teacher education institutions.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size in this current study was determined based on the principle of saturation. Saturation in qualitative research refers to the point at which researchers have collected enough data to develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon, and further data collection is unlikely to yield significant new insights or information (Guest et al., 2006). Saturation was deemed to have been reached when subsequent responses began to reinforce previously identified patterns without introducing novel perspectives. Within every institution involved in this study, two additional interviews were conducted to confirm saturation, which further validated the recurrence and stability of the key themes.

Participants were selected from three teacher education institutions in Ghana, representing the Southern Zone, Middle Zone, and Northern Zone of Ghana respectively. These participants primarily teach preservice teachers. The institutions involved in this study comprised of one university and two colleges of education. At the university, saturation was achieved after five lecturers were interviewed while at the two colleges of education, saturation was achieved after engaging six and five tutors respectively.

Sampling Technique

Homogeneous sampling technique was applied in this study as all teachers involved had received training on play-based learning, allowing the researchers to gather rich, detailed data on how these teachers integrate play-based learning in their lessons. Applying homogeneous sampling ensured that participants shared similar key characteristics, reducing the likelihood of confounding variables such as differences in teaching methodologies. While homogeneous purposive sampling was suitable for selecting tutors and lecturers with relevant training and experience in play-based learning, the technique carries the risk of over-generalization due to its focus on a specific group within particular institutions. To mitigate this limitation, participants were drawn from multiple departments and institutions to enhance the diversity of perspectives.

Research Instrument

This current study utilized a semi-structured interview guide aimed at eliciting how tutors/lecturers integrate play-based learning in their instructional delivery. The initial probes of the interview guide centred on tutors'/lecturers' understanding of play-based learning as well as their motivations for engaging their learners in that particular instructional method. The next probes in the interview guide focused on the play-based strategies tutors/lecturers implemented and how they executed these strategies in the classroom in teaching pre-service teachers. Tutors/lecturers were also probed on their role during play-based learning, as well as how they used play-based learning in assessment. The personal and environmental challenges encountered by tutors/lecturers were probed as well. It is informative to note that the probes in the interview guide were applied in a flexible manner and in most cases, the researchers involved in this study applied specific probes based on the response(s) of tutors/lecturers.

Data Management Analysis

Data was collected in this study spanned three-month period, from August 2023 to November 2023. All data collected for the purposes of this research were stored in audio-recorders and backed-up on *Google Drive*. Quantitative data related to demographic characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. After transcribing the interviews, the researchers read through all transcripts multiple times to familiarize themselves with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively using color coding. These codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader categories based on patterns and conceptual similarities. Themes were developed by clustering related codes and continuously refining them to ensure they reflected the data meaningfully and coherently. To enhance the validity of the themes, peer debriefing and cross-checking among the research team were conducted. Themes were reviewed against the raw data to confirm their accuracy and consistency.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Education, Winneba, with certificate number 2022/IRB/215. Researchers involved in this study ensured informed consent from all tutors/lecturers involved in the study as well as the fact that participation

was entirely voluntary. The right of participants to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalty was emphasized in the informed consent document. Participants were assured that the anticipated risks associated with the study were minimal, and the potential benefit lies in contributing to a deeper understanding of perspectives on play-based learning, which could have implications for enhancing teaching practices and teacher education.

Confidentiality was a crucial aspect of the informed consent, and participants were assured that all records related to their responses would be kept confidential. Additionally, any reports or publications resulting from the study will ensure the anonymization of participants' identities. Participants were also encouraged to address any questions or issues related to the research processes and informed consent to the researchers. The authors acknowledge that Right To Play, an organization actively involved in training tutors and lecturers in play-based learning funded this current study. To minimize potential bias, the research team maintained full independence in designing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting the findings.

Results

Overall, 16 tutors (12 males; 4 females) completed this current study. The demographic characteristics of tutors/lecturers who completed the qualitative phase are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Tutors/Lecturers in the Qualitative Phase*

Demographic	Male f (%)	Female f (%)	Total n (%)
<u>Age (years)</u>			
30-34	1 (8.3)	-	1 (6.3)
35-39	1 (8.3)	-	1 (6.3)
40-44	3 (25)	1 (25)	4 (25)
45-49	5 (41.7)	2 (50)	7 (43.8)
50-54	2 (16.7)	1 (50)	3 (18.8)
55-60	-	-	-
<u>Department</u>			
Educational Studies	5 (41.7)	2 (50)	7 (43.8)
Languages	-	1 (25)	1 (6.3)

Early Childhood	4 (33.3)	-	4 (25)
Mathematics and Information and Communications Technology	2 (16)	-	2 (12.5)
Technical and Vocational Education and Training	1 (8.3)	1 (25)	2 (12.5)
<u>Subject Area</u>			
Education	5 (41.7)	2 (50)	7 (43.8)
Mathematics	2 (16.7)	-	2 (12.5)
Numeracy	3 (25)	-	3 (18.8)
Literacy	1 (8.3)	-	1 (6.3)
Clothing and Textiles	1 (8.3)	1 (25)	2 (12.5)
English	-	1 (25)	1 (6.3)
<u>Teaching Experience</u>			
1-4 years	2 (16.7)	1 (25)	3 (18.8)
5-8 years	5 (41.7)	2 (50)	7 (43.8)
9-12 years	3 (25)	1 (8.3)	4 (25)
13 years or more	2 (16.7)	-	2 (12.5)

Note. f = frequency, n = number of units

The mean age of tutors/lecturers was 45.3 years (standard deviation of 5.8 years).

The age range of 45-49 years was the modal age of tutors/lecturers with male tutors constituting 71.4% of this age group. The Department of Educational Studies was the department with the highest number of respondents, with 43.8% of all respondents affiliated to the department. Tutors/lecturers were spread across six different subjects with education being the most common subject. Majority of tutors/lecturers had at least 5 years of experience on the job.

Although Ghana's play-based learning policy focuses on Early Childhood Education (KG–Primary 3), this study included tutors from departments such as Languages, Vocational Training, and Information and Communications Technology. These tutors contribute to the training of pre-service Early Childhood Education teachers through content and pedagogical courses. The inclusion of these tutors offers a broader view of how play-based learning is interpreted across teacher education programmes.

Tutors'/Lecturers' Personal Understanding of Play-Based Learning in Lesson Delivery

The findings related to tutor's understanding of play-based learning are presented in Table 2 as themes and supporting quotes.

Table 2: *Tutors' Personal Understanding of Play-Based Learning*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Using Play as a Medium of Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Play based learning means teaching through play, using play as a medium of instruction..." (Respondent 1) • "Play based learning to me, is using play as a medium teaching your content to your learners." (Respondent 2)
Engaging and Motivating Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It is a means of making students motivated and then, uh, also help them to understand the teaching." (Respondent 5) • "...use some form of play activities to motivate the learner as well as the teacher..." (Respondent 8)
Incorporating Real-Life and Interactive Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Ensuring that learning becomes interactive and linked to normal things that they know in the environment..." (Respondent 11) • "...makes teaching and learning easy and self-explanatory helping them to discover knowledge for themselves..." (Respondent 12)
Unconscious Learning Through Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Play base learning is about trying to achieve a lesson through play without the learners knowing they are learning." (Respondent 9) • "...making learners understand concepts without the learners knowing they are learning." (Respondent 10)

“Using play as a medium of instruction” as espoused by tutors/lecturers suggests play-based learning involves integrating playful activities into teaching to convey educational content. It leverages play as a dynamic tool to communicate complex concepts in an accessible and engaging manner for learners. The theme “engaging and motivating learners” and supporting quotes are

indicative of tutors'/lecturers' understanding of play-based learning as emphasizing the role of play in sparking curiosity while driving active participation towards learning for both learners as well as tutors/lecturers. The theme of "incorporating real-life and interactive elements" emphasizes tutors'/lecturers' understanding of the profound impact of play-based learning on connecting education to practical experiences and promoting meaningful interactions. Thus, play-based learning serves as a vehicle to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and the real world. The theme of unconscious learning through play suggests that tutors/lecturers understand play-based learning operates as a conduit for knowledge acquisition that occurs almost effortlessly and with little to no conscious realization. This theme highlights the subtle, yet powerful way in which play can seamlessly blend education with enjoyment.

Tutors'/Lecturers' Motivation for Using Play-Based Learning

The outcomes derived from the thematic analysis concerning tutors' or lecturers' motivation for employing play-based learning are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: *Tutors'/Lecturers' Motivation for Using Play-Based Learning*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Engagement and Enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It is self-rewarding and is easy to get the attention of learners helping them to forget about their worries." (Respondent 1). • "Play-based learning helps learners to understand the lesson very well." (Respondent 5)
Active Learning and Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It makes teaching and learning easy and self-explanatory helping them to discover knowledge for themselves." (Respondent 2). • "It allows the learners contribute to the lesson to get in-depth understanding of the course." (Respondent 4)
Enhanced Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Because it makes my teaching easier, understandable and it allows the learners contribute to the lesson to get in-depth understanding of the course." (Respondent 4) • "For me, I have realized that through play learners learn so well. They learn without

knowing that they are learning a lot within a short time." (Respondent 7)

The theme ‘engagement and enjoyment’ as motivation for tutors’/lecturers’ use of play-based learning reflects the tutors’/lecturers’ recognition that play-based learning captures learners’ attention and generates a sense of enjoyment. They observe that using play as a pedagogical approach helps students become more immersed in the learning process, making it self-rewarding. Tutors express that play-based learning promotes active participation and encourages students to explore and discover knowledge on their own. The idea that play-based learning makes teaching and learning easy and self-explanatory reflects the tutors’ belief that when learning is enjoyable and interactive, students are more likely to take charge of their own learning. Finally, tutors/lecturers highlighted the improved understanding that results from utilizing play-based learning. They recognize that play-based activities facilitate better comprehension of lessons. The idea that play makes teaching easier and more understandable suggests that tutors perceive a direct link between playfulness and effective communication of complex concepts.

Tutors’/Lecturers’ Play-based Strategies and how they are employed in the Classroom

The themes derived from tutors’/lecturers’ strategies for play-based learning as well as how they are implemented during instructional delivery are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Play-Based Strategies of Tutors/Lecturers*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Guided Approach for Safety and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I employ the guided approach where as an instructor, I give the instructions and guide them, at the early grade level you need to make sure that the child going to the play center is safe and secure, that’s why I use the guided approach." (Respondent 1)
Guided Play-Based Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Many at times I used guided play based strategy depending on my objective and the number of students available for me. First of all, I do tell a riddle after which I put them into groups with task after which I move round to supervise their work and after sometime, I ask them to present their

Combination of Free Play
and Guided Strategies

works to the whole class in the form of discussion."
(Respondent 3)

- "I use the free play and guided strategies in my lessons. I can start with free play whereby they can explore on their own. It helps the learners to remain within the time conference of the teaching and also to guide on what exactly is expected for them to learn." (Respondent 4)
-

The theme “guided approach for safety and security” revolves around the tutors'/lecturers’ emphasis on employing a guided approach in lesson delivery. Tutors in this theme highlight the importance of providing clear instructions and guidance to the learners during play-based learning. The guided approach aims to ensure that learners are engaged in activities that are not only educational but also safe. For instance, Respondent 1 explained, "I employ the guided approach where as an instructor, I give the instructions and guide them, at the early grade level you need to make sure that the child going to the play center is safe and secure, that’s why I use the guided approach." In the aforementioned narrative, the tutor/lecturer emphasizes that the guided approach is chosen as a means to ensure the safety and security of young learners. “Guided play-based-learning” theme on the other hand highlights the tutors'/lecturer adoption of guided play-based strategies in their lesson delivery. Guided play involves providing a structured environment where tutors/lecturers facilitate play experiences to ensure learning objectives are met while still allowing learners to explore and make choices. Tutors employing this approach mentioned using various interventions to guide students' play and facilitate learning. These interventions included giving tasks, supervising group work, and encouraging whole-class discussions. Finally, “combination of free play and guided strategies” highlights the tutors'/lecturers’ use of a hybrid approach that combines elements of free play and guided strategies. Tutors in this theme describe how they start with a period of free play that enable students to explore and engage in play-based learning on their own terms. This is followed by a shift toward guided strategies to ensure that students remain within the scope of the lesson objectives and to guide their learning.

Preparation of Learning Environment and Materials for Lesson Delivery

Tutors narrated how they prepared the learning environment and related materials as part of play-based learning. The themes emanating from these narratives and supporting quote are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: *Preparation of Learning Environment and Materials for Lesson Delivery*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Interactive Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The learning materials I use in teaching include bottle tops and card boards. I sometimes do the cutting of the materials myself and at times allow the students themselves do it depending on the instruction given. When I am teaching measurement for instance, I make the students bring bottles and cans and fill them up with water and I begin to ask them the level their water is in the can with their different sizes." (Respondent 4) • "For example, I teach art, so if I'm going to teach colors, I come along with pebbles. Pebbles of different colors. So, then they have to come and select pebbles colors that they like, that has the meaning and, I use that in as a form of play to enhance their understanding." (Respondent 5)
Group Dynamics and Arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "When it comes to teaching and learning, we usually pair them or group them and as the time goes on, we reduce their number in the group for the physical arrangement. I normally group them into ten in a group because of the class size and the space." (Respondent 4)

“Interactive learning materials” as a theme revolves around the types of materials used by the tutors/lecturers to engage learners in play-based learning activities. The tutors/lecturers in this theme specifically highlight their use of hands-on, interactive, and tangible materials to enhance the learning experience. These materials are designed to be manipulated, explored, and experimented with, fostering active participation and understanding among the learners. The theme “group dynamics and arrangement” focuses on the tutors'/lecturers’ strategies for organizing

learners into groups and optimizing the physical arrangement of the learning space. Group dynamics play a crucial role in promoting collaboration, interaction, and shared learning experiences. Additionally, the tutors address the practical aspect of arranging learners in a way that is conducive to both effective learning and the available space.

The Role of Tutors/Lecturers and Learners during Play-Based Learning

The theme related to the role of tutors/lecturers and learners during play-based learning are summarized in Table 6 and Table 7 respectively.

Table 6: *The role of tutors/lecturers and learners during play-based learning*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Facilitator Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My role in the class is just a facilitator through observing and guiding the learners. The learners play the role of being an active participant in the class." (Respondent 1) • "I will be a facilitator by guiding and monitoring so that in order to control the class, not to use the whole Play-Based activity for the entire lesson." (Respondent 2)

Table 7: *The Role of Learners in Play-Based Learning as Espoused by Tutors/Lecturers*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Active Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My role in the class is just a facilitator through observing and guiding the children. The learners play the role of being an active participant in the class." (Respondent 1) • "My role during play based learning is active passive one when they are engaging in their activities, I find out the necessary help I can offer them to actively participate in the activities." (Respondent 5)
Exploration and Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "That is my role as a facilitator and with the learners theirs is to play, explore and interact with the materials as many as they can at a time." (Respondent 7)

Leadership and
Collaboration

- "As for the learners, they interact with the resources I provide during the lesson activities." (Respondent 8)
 - "When I pair them, I make one the leader and the others the subordinate. The leader act as a guide to guide his colleagues who are now subordinates in any given activity." (Respondent 1)
-

The “facilitator role” of tutors/lecturers centers on their supportive and guiding role during play-based learning. They create an environment that encourages active learning, exploration, and engagement among the learners. The focus is on fostering independent thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. The theme “active participation” emphasizes the role of the learners as active participants in play-based learning. The learners are not passive recipients of information but are actively engaged in constructing knowledge through play-based learning. They contribute to the learning experience by exploring, interacting, and taking part in various tasks. “Exploration and interaction” reflect the importance of learners' exploration and interaction with materials and resources. The facilitator's role is to create an environment where learners can freely explore and interact with a variety of materials. Learning through hands-on experience and experimentation is emphasized. “Leadership and collaboration” as part of the role of learners during play-based learning underscores the dynamics of leadership and collaboration among learners. The facilitator may encourage learners to take on leadership roles and collaborate with their peers during activities. This can enhance communication skills, cooperation, and the sharing of ideas.

Tutors/Lecturers Description of Play-Based Learning in Lessons (Introducing the Lesson, Exploring, Explaining, Elaborating or Evaluating the Lesson)

The outcomes derived from the thematic analysis concerning tutors’ description of play-based learning in lessons (introducing the lesson, exploring, explaining, elaborating or evaluating the lesson) are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8: *Tutors/Lecturers Description of Play-Based Learning in Lessons (Introducing the Lesson, Exploring, Explaining, Elaborating or Evaluating the Lesson)*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Creative Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "In our Numeracy lesson about measurement, I initiated a 'Measurement Relay,' where students measured and compared lengths using non-standard units, like their own footsteps." (Respondent 3)• I engage them in singing and dancing to prepare their mind... during the lesson introduction, we do that through singing and dancing." (Respondent 10)
Interactive Exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "In our Literacy session, we embarked on a 'Descriptive Writing Safari,' where students observed a picture of a scene, jotted down descriptive words, and shared their creative descriptions." (Respondent 5)• "During our science class, we engaged in a 'Living vs. Non-Living' sorting game to explore characteristics. Students sorted items into categories, fostering an understanding of these concepts." (Respondent 9)
Engaging Explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "To explain the water cycle, I conducted a 'Water Cycle Skit,' with students acting as water molecules, clouds, and rain. This playful demonstration helped solidify their understanding of the process." (Respondent 6)• "During our Literacy lesson on dialogue, I organized a 'Character Conversation' activity. Students paired up and created short dialogues, ensuring proper use of quotation marks and punctuation." (Respondent 13)

"Creative Introduction" revolves around how tutors/lecturers initiate lessons or topics using imaginative and interactive methods. The goal is to spark students' curiosity while making the content relevant and engaging. In the context of tutors' instructional delivery, the theme of "Interactive Exploration" refers to the deliberate use of hands-on and participatory activities that encourage students to actively engage with the subject matter. Tutors design activities that allow students to explore concepts, materials, or scenarios in a dynamic and interactive manner. Thus, fostering deeper understanding and enhancing the learning experience. The theme of "Engaging

Explanation" centers on the tutors/lecturers' approach to delivering explanations that captivate students' attention while making contents more accessible. Tutors employ creative techniques and interactive strategies to explain content in ways that resonate with students and enhance their comprehension. It is informative to note that the probes related to elaborating and evaluating lessons using play-based learning did not yield meaningful themes as tutors/lecturers generally did not apply play-based learning in those areas as part of their lesson delivery.

Tutors'/Lecturers' Use of Play-Based Learning for The Purpose of Assessment

The theme related to the use of play-based learning for assessment purposes is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: *Tutors'/Lecturers' Use of Play-Based Learning for Assessment Purposes*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Limited Play-Based Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Honestly, I rarely use play-based learning in assessment." (Respondent 11) • "I hardly use play-based learning in assessment. I am not sure how I will use that for assessment." (Respondent 9) • "For assessment, I don't use Play-Based." (Respondent 12)
Traditional Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I hardly use play-based learning for assessment. My assessments usually take the form of traditional assessment." (Respondent 14)
Reflective Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "For assessment, I use play-based learning to engage learners and make them reflect on what they learn. For instance, I make students stand in circular formation then I throw a ball to one of them telling him/her after catching the ball to tell us what he learnt from the lesson. After that when that particular student is done, another student catches the ball and offers what he/she learnt." (Respondent 8)

The theme "limited play-based usage" refers to the trend where tutors/lecturers hardly applied play-based activities as tools for assessment. Their comments suggest they learned more towards traditional assessment methods and did not primarily view play as a means of assessment. Thus,

there is a potential gap between the concept of play-based learning and its application in assessing students' understanding and knowledge based on the expressions of tutors/lecturers. Again, the theme suggests that the respondents may view play-based learning as less suitable for formal evaluation and might opt for methods they believe provide a more standardized and measurable way of assessing students' knowledge and skills. The theme "reflective assessment" captures the way in which some tutors/lecturers employ play-based learning as a means to encourage active participation and introspection among learners during the assessment process. In this context, "reflective assessment" refers to using interactive activities to prompt students to think critically about their learning experiences and articulate their insights and understanding which in turn, provides opportunities for tutors/lecturers to assess them.

Inhibiting Factors Related to Implementing Play-Based Learning

Table 10 presents the results of the thematic analysis of the inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of play-based learning based on tutors'/lecturers' experiences.

Table 10: *Inhibiting Factors Related to Implementing Play-Based Learning*

Themes	Supporting Quotes
Classroom Space Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The seats are made of metal and any little mistake could lead to injuries." (Respondent 10) • "There is not enough space in the classrooms for play-based learning." (Respondent 13) • "The problem is the size of the classroom. Usually when you put the learners in groups, there is not enough space for them to engage in some forms of play-based learning." (Respondent 9)
Time Allocation Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The time allocation for the activities into the course is a big challenge." (Respondent 14) • "My challenge is that, there is no enough time to implement play-based learning." (Respondent 5)
Lack of Materials/Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Again, we do not have enough materials to practice effective play-based learning." (Respondent 4)

Managing Large Class
Sizes

- "The size of the students is also a challenge."
(Respondent 6)
 - "Due to the large class size, sometimes, if you want to use play-based learning some students do not really participate as it is more difficult to control every learner during play-based learning."
(Respondent 7)
-

The theme "classroom space constraints" refers to the challenges faced by tutors/lecturers when attempting to implement play-based learning activities due to limitations in the physical space of the classroom. This theme encompasses several issues related to the physical layout and size of the classroom. Tutors/lecturers in this theme describe their classrooms as having limited physical space. This constraint can make it difficult to create separate play areas or to rearrange furniture for play-based activities. It also affects the overall mobility and comfort of both students and tutors/lecturers within the classroom. In some cases, the classrooms are equipped with metal seats or furniture that may pose safety risks during play-based activities. These concerns stem from the potential for accidents or injuries when students engage in active play within confined spaces with hard or sharp objects. Again, tutors/lecturers asserted that when students are divided into groups for play-based learning, there may not be sufficient space for each group to engage effectively. This limitation can hinder collaborative and interactive play experiences, which are often central to play-based learning.

The theme "time allocation challenges" refers to the challenges teachers encounter due to the perception of limited time on the timetable for play-based activities. Tutors/lecturers in this theme emphasized that they have insufficient time allocated for play-based learning within their curriculum or teaching schedule. This limitation can arise from various factors, including strict time constraints dictated by educational standards or curricular requirements. The theme "lack of materials/resources" pertains to the challenges faced by tutors/lecturers when implementing play-based learning due to a shortage of essential materials and resources necessary to conduct these activities effectively. "Managing large class sizes" as a theme revolves around the difficulties tutors/lecturers encounter when trying to facilitate play-based learning in classrooms with a high number of students. These difficulties included challenges with offering individual attention to

students, managing student behavior, as well as varying levels of engagement by students during play-based learning.

Discussion

Consistent with the views espoused by Dockett (2011) as well as Fleer (2015), tutors'/lecturers' personal understanding of play-based learning revealed they perceived it as pedagogical tool that can be strategically employed to deliver instructional content. Additionally, the tutors/lecturers emphasized the motivational aspect of play and believed that it can significantly enhance student engagement and interest. On tutors'/lecturers' motivation for using play-based learning, the belief in play as a tool for deepening understanding reveals a recognition of its potential to facilitate cognitive development and knowledge construction on the part of learners. These potential benefits of play-based learning are consistent with those espoused by the Lego Foundation (2017), which emphasized the role of play in developing learners' social, emotional, physical, and creative skills. Relative to the play-based strategies applied by tutors/lecturers, the use of a guided approach suggests a structured environment where play is facilitated and directed towards specific learning objectives. The findings also highlight the flexibility of play-based strategies, with tutors/lecturers adapting their approach based on factors such as age, class size, and learning objectives.

Two main themes emerged relative to the preparation of the environment for play-based learning by tutors/lecturers. Firstly, tutors emphasized hands-on, interactive materials that students could manipulate and explore. This promotes active engagement and deeper understanding of the lesson for learners. Again, as asserted by Tomlinson (2014), interactive materials affords teachers the opportunity to address different learning preferences, making learning more inclusive and effective (Smith, 2020; White 2018). Secondly, the tutors/lecturers highlighted the importance of group dynamics and space arrangement. Tutors/lecturers recognize that group work promotes collaboration, peer learning, and social skills when it comes to implementing play-based learning. Optimizing the space ensures movement, interaction, and access to materials. Daniels and Steineke (2017) asserted these arrangements are crucial for successful implementation of play-based learning. Overall, these findings suggest a thoughtful approach by tutors as they leverage play to engage learners and create a positive environment for play-based learning.

The role of tutors/lecturers during play-based learning revealed they largely adopted the facilitator role during play-based learning. This suggests their primary role is to guide, observe, and support

learners as they actively engage in the learning process. This finding emphasizes the need for moderation for effective play-based learning as espoused by Makaudze and Gudhlanga (2011) as well as Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008). This facilitator role implies a shift from traditional teaching methods, where the teacher is the primary knowledge dispenser, to a more student-centered approach.

The findings revealed tutors/lecturers consistently saw the learner as an active participant in the play-based learning process. This active participant role involved the learner exploring, interacting with materials, and collaborating with peers. This perspective espoused by tutor/lecturers aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that prioritize student-centered learning and emphasizes the learner's role in constructing knowledge. Furthermore, the emergence of leadership as a theme suggests that play-based learning can provide opportunities for students to develop essential skills such as cooperation, communication, and decision-making.

The data revealed that tutors/lecturers generally integrated play-based learning across the different stages of the lesson. Again, tutors/lecturers, through play-based learning, emphasized creative and interactive approaches to introduce and explore new concepts. They alluded to activities such as measurement relays and sorting games that demonstrated how play can be used to capture the attention and arouse the curiosity of learners. Applying engaging explanations like water cycle skits and character conversations suggests tutors/lecturers transformed complex concepts into simpler, memorable and interactive experiences for learners.

Tutors/lecturers generally expressed a preference for traditional assessment methods rather than using play-based learning. Obviously, this indicates a potential gap in knowledge or confidence regarding the use of play-based approaches for the purposes of assessment. It is informative to note that Respondent 8 presented a different narrative, in which a ball-through activity was incorporated into an assessment activity.

Constraints related to infrastructure, time and classroom management were prominent inhibiting factors related to implementing play-based learning as recounted by tutors/lecturers. Limited classroom space and limited resources means tutors/lecturers face a limitation on the choice of activities for play-based learning. Time as a constraint for implementing play-based learning suggests some tutors/lecturers felt the subject time allocation on the timetable were not conducive for play-based learning. Tutors/lecturers managing large classes mean they may have

limited control over play-based activities. Again, it is possible some learners in extremely large classes may not have the opportunity to fully participate in play-based learning activities. Overall, these inhibitory factors limit the opportunities for play-based learning as recounted by Jay and Knaus (2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study highlighted a growing interest in play-based learning among Ghanaian tutors/lecturers. This underscores the potential of play-based learning to revolutionize teaching practices and enrich student learning experiences. While there is a clear recognition of the benefits of play-based learning by tutors/lecturers, several militating factors including insufficient instructional resources, limited classroom space, and time constraints appear to limit its full implementation. The findings of this current study suggest that for play-based learning to take hold as an effective and beneficial means of instruction, there must be a shift in both institutional priorities and resource allocation. Again, the study indicates that despite the barriers to effective play-based learning implementation, tutors/lecturers in Ghana remain enthusiastic about play-based learning. Thus, with proper support, play-based learning could play a key role in reshaping the educational landscape in Ghana.

It is recommended that Right To Play and its partners continue offering targeted professional development on play-based learning with a focus on theory, classroom application, and assessment design. These professional development sessions should include practical strategies for managing large class sizes, utilizing limited classroom space creatively, and adapting play-based methods for formative and summative assessments. As much as possible, the training modules should also include inclusive practices to ensure all learners, including those with special educational needs benefit from play-based learning.

It is recommended teacher education universities, and colleges should allocate dedicated funding to support the implementation of play-based learning. This may include budget lines for instructional materials, flexible classroom infrastructure, and play-based learning resource kits. Additionally, scholarships, research grants, and innovation funds should be established to support faculty and student-led initiatives focused on developing contextually relevant play-based practices.

Regular stakeholder forums should be established to deepen and enhance play-based learning in the various organisations. These forums should target challenges, successes, and best practices related to play-based learning. Furthermore, collaborative research initiatives between the different stakeholders in Ghana can generate evidence to support play-based learning and reduce potential barriers. Also, engaging educators, administrators, and policymakers in curriculum development can ensure play-based learning is effectively integrated in different organisations.

Author Contribution

Frank Twum: Designing of the research instrument, field data collection, data analysis and writing this manuscript. Samuel Kweku Hayford: Designing of the research instrument, field data collection, and data analysis. Dandy George Dampson: Designing of the research instrument, field data collection, and data analysis. Johnnie Hayford: field data collection and data analysis

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest or competing financial or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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