

Inclusive Play-Based Instruction and Socioemotional Learning Support Among Kindergarten Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study examined inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support among Kindergarten teachers in Santo Niño, Cagayan. It focused on how teachers provided accessible play activities, encouraged learner participation, used differentiated play materials, facilitated play, and maintained inclusive classroom routines in relation to their support for children's emotional awareness, self-regulation, peer relationships, empathy, and classroom belongingness. The study employed an explanatory sequential predictive-correlational design with instructional support profiling. Total enumeration sampling was used among Kindergarten teachers. Data were gathered through a validated researcher-made

questionnaire, which obtained an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93, indicating excellent reliability. The data were analyzed using weighted mean, standard deviation, Spearman's rank-order correlation, dominance-based multiple regression analysis, and instructional support priority mapping. Results revealed a high level of inclusive play-based instruction and a high level of socioemotional learning support. Teacher facilitation during play emerged as the strongest area of inclusive play-based instruction, while classroom belongingness was the strongest area of socioemotional learning support. However, differentiated play materials and self-regulation guidance appeared as areas needing further improvement. A strong positive and significant relationship was found between inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support. Regression findings further showed that teacher facilitation during play, inclusive classroom routines, and learner participation in play significantly predicted socioemotional learning support. The study concluded that inclusive play-based instruction served as a meaningful pathway for strengthening socioemotional learning in Kindergarten classrooms. It recommended greater support for differentiated play materials, structured self-regulation strategies, and teacher development on inclusive play facilitation.

Keywords: *Inclusive Play-Based Instruction, Socioemotional Learning Support, Kindergarten Teachers, Early Childhood Education, Self-Regulation, Classroom Belongingness*

INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten education serves as a critical stage in children's holistic development because it provides the foundation for later learning, social participation, emotional regulation, and positive adjustment to formal schooling. At this level, learning is not limited to the early mastery of letters, numbers, and classroom routines. Rather, it involves the gradual formation of confidence, curiosity, self-expression, cooperation, empathy, and independence. Young children learn best when they are allowed to explore, manipulate materials, interact with peers, express ideas freely, and make meaning from concrete experiences. This is why play has remained central to quality early childhood education. UNICEF and The LEGO Foundation (2018) emphasized that play in the early years enables children to understand the world, develop imagination and creativity, build language, and strengthen social, emotional, and cognitive skills. In this sense, play is not merely a break from instruction, but a meaningful instructional approach that supports the whole child.

In the Philippine basic education system, play-based learning is also recognized as an essential feature of Kindergarten instruction. The Department of Education (2016), through the K to 12 Kindergarten Curriculum Guide, identified socioemotional development as one of the key developmental domains for five-year-old Filipino children. The curriculum includes competencies related to self-awareness, expression of emotions, understanding the feelings of others, interaction with peers and adults, cooperation, and self-management. These competencies show that Kindergarten learning is expected to develop not only academic readiness but also emotional and social maturity. The Department of Education (2024) further strengthened this direction through the MATATAG Curriculum, which integrates socioemotional learning and future-ready skills into the curriculum. These policy directions affirm that Kindergarten teachers are expected to create learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, inclusive, emotionally supportive, and responsive to the varied needs of young learners.

Inclusive play-based instruction is particularly important in Kindergarten because children enter school with different abilities, learning styles, family backgrounds, languages, temperaments, and developmental needs. Some children may be socially confident, while others may be shy, hesitant, impulsive, anxious, or still learning how to interact with classmates. Others may need additional support because of delayed language development, behavioral concerns, disability, poverty-related disadvantages, or limited exposure to early learning opportunities. UNESCO (2020) described inclusion as a continuing process of embracing diversity, building belonging, and respecting the value and potential of every learner. In the classroom, this means that teachers must design play-based activities where all children can participate meaningfully, regardless of their differences. Inclusive instruction requires teachers to adjust materials, groupings, classroom routines, language use, and levels of assistance so that play becomes a space for participation rather than exclusion.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children explained that developmentally appropriate practice requires teachers to make intentional decisions based on children's common developmental patterns, individual characteristics, and social and cultural contexts. NAEYC (2020) emphasized that meaningful early childhood instruction should provide active engagement through play, exploration, and inquiry while supporting children socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. This view is highly relevant to Kindergarten classrooms because teachers are not only facilitators of lessons but also careful observers of children's behavior, interests, emotions, and peer relationships. Through inclusive play-based instruction, teachers can provide structured and unstructured opportunities for children to negotiate roles, follow rules, share materials, solve problems, wait for turns, communicate needs, and manage frustration. These experiences naturally connect play with socioemotional learning because children learn emotional and social skills through actual interaction rather than through verbal instruction alone.

Socioemotional learning support is a significant part of early childhood teaching because young learners are still developing the ability to recognize feelings, regulate emotions, build relationships, and respond appropriately to classroom situations. OECD (2025) noted that effective socioemotional support involves nurturing a positive classroom climate, building strong teacher-child relationships, and actively helping learners practice social and emotional skills. For Kindergarten learners, such support may be seen in simple but meaningful teacher practices such as greeting children warmly, helping them name their emotions, guiding them during conflict, modeling respectful communication, using stories and role play, providing calming routines, and encouraging children to express themselves through art, music, movement, and dramatic play. These strategies help children feel safe, accepted, and capable, which are necessary conditions for participation in learning.

In local school contexts such as Santo Niño, Cagayan, the role of Kindergarten teachers becomes even more important because they are expected to translate national curriculum standards into actual classroom experiences that are sensitive to learners' realities. Children in Kindergarten may come from diverse family conditions, community backgrounds, and levels of school readiness. As such, teachers need to balance play, structure, inclusion, and socioemotional guidance in everyday instruction. While play-based learning is strongly encouraged in early childhood education, its effective implementation depends on how teachers plan activities, adapt materials, manage learner differences, and respond to children's emotional and behavioral needs. A classroom may have toys, songs, games, and activities, but these do not automatically become inclusive or socioemotionally supportive unless the teacher intentionally uses them to promote participation, cooperation, confidence, empathy, and belonging.

Despite the recognized value of play-based learning and socioemotional development, challenges may still arise in practice. Kindergarten teachers may experience difficulty in managing large or diverse classes, preparing inclusive learning materials, addressing children's varied behaviors, supporting learners with emerging developmental needs, and balancing curriculum expectations with child-centered approaches. Some teachers may also need further support in designing play activities that are not only enjoyable but also inclusive, purposeful, and aligned with socioemotional learning goals. UNICEF Philippines (2024) highlighted the importance of understanding socioemotional skills in the education system, particularly in helping educators and policymakers support learners' development in ways that go beyond academic achievement. This suggests the need to examine how Kindergarten teachers actually provide socioemotional learning support within their instructional practices.

Therefore, this study focuses on two essential dimensions of early childhood education: the inclusiveness of play-based instruction and the support given to children's socioemotional growth. By examining these areas in the context of Santo Niño, Cagayan, the study may provide meaningful insights into how Kindergarten teachers create learning environments where children can play, participate, relate with others, express emotions, and develop confidence. The findings may also help identify strengths, gaps, and possible areas for professional development, instructional improvement, and school-level support. Ultimately, the study is anchored on the belief that Kindergarten classrooms should not only prepare children for academic learning but also help them feel accepted, understood, emotionally secure, and ready to engage with others in a caring and inclusive learning community.

Literature Review

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

Inclusive early childhood education is anchored on the belief that every child has the right to participate meaningfully in learning, regardless of ability, language, behavior, culture, family background, or developmental readiness. In the Kindergarten classroom, inclusion does not only mean placing children together in one learning space. It means designing learning experiences where all children are recognized, supported, and given opportunities to engage according to their strengths and needs. UNESCO (2020)

emphasized that inclusion in education requires systems to identify and remove barriers that exclude learners because of background, ability, poverty, language, gender, displacement, or other circumstances. This understanding is important in Kindergarten because children enter school with varied levels of social maturity, communication skills, emotional control, and readiness for structured learning. An inclusive Kindergarten classroom therefore becomes a space where differences are not treated as problems, but as natural parts of the learning community.

In early childhood education, inclusion must be translated into daily classroom practices. Teachers need to adjust activities, materials, classroom routines, and interaction patterns so that learners can participate in ways that are appropriate to their developmental level. This is supported by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which explains that developmentally appropriate practice should recognize children as unique individuals who belong to families and communities and who bring different strengths into the classroom. NAEYC (2020) further stressed that early childhood instruction should be culturally, linguistically, and ability responsive. This means that Kindergarten teachers must not rely on one method of teaching for all children. Instead, they must observe learners carefully, adapt play experiences, provide scaffolding, and create a classroom climate where each child feels safe, valued, and capable of joining classroom activities.

Play-Based Instruction in Kindergarten

Play-based instruction is one of the most developmentally appropriate approaches in Kindergarten because young children learn best through active, concrete, and meaningful experiences. Play allows children to explore objects, imitate real-life situations, use language, solve problems, express feelings, and interact with others. UNICEF and The LEGO Foundation (2018) explained that play in early childhood helps children make sense of the world while strengthening imagination, creativity, language, social skills, emotional development, and cognitive growth. This shows that play is not merely a recreational activity or a reward after formal lessons. It is a serious and purposeful learning process that allows children to develop foundational skills in a natural and engaging way.

The value of play-based instruction lies in its ability to connect learning with children's lived experiences. Through pretend play, building activities, songs, movement games, storytelling, art, outdoor play, and cooperative games, children learn concepts while also practicing self-expression and interaction. Zosh et al. (2017) described learning through play as a process that supports children in becoming creative, engaged, and lifelong learners. Their evidence review highlights that play can support multiple domains of development when it is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, socially interactive, and iterative. For Kindergarten teachers, this means that play must be planned with intention. It should not be left entirely to chance, nor should it become overly controlled. The teacher's role is to prepare rich learning opportunities, observe children's responses, guide interactions, ask thoughtful questions, and extend children's thinking without removing the joy and spontaneity of play.

Inclusive Play-Based Instruction

Inclusive play-based instruction combines the principles of inclusion and play-centered pedagogy. It recognizes that play becomes more powerful when all children are able to participate, contribute, and experience belonging. In a Kindergarten classroom, some children may dominate group play, while others may remain silent, withdraw from peers, refuse to share, or struggle to follow rules. Some may have difficulty communicating their ideas, managing frustration, or adjusting to group activities. Inclusive play-based instruction responds to these differences by making play accessible, flexible, and supportive. It may involve modifying materials, simplifying rules, providing visual cues, using peer buddies, offering choices, repeating routines, giving emotional prompts, or using small-group activities for children who need more support.

NAEYC (2020) connects play-based learning with the whole child by emphasizing active engagement through play, exploration, and inquiry in ways that support children socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. This is important because inclusive play-based instruction is not only concerned with whether children are playing, but also with how they are included in the play experience. A teacher may ask whether each child has access to materials, whether quieter children are invited into group roles, whether children with communication difficulties are given alternative ways to express themselves, and whether the classroom environment supports both independence and cooperation. In this sense, inclusive play-based instruction requires intentionality. It calls on teachers to design play as a shared learning space where children learn with and from one another.

Socioemotional Learning in Early Childhood

Socioemotional learning refers to the development of skills that help children understand themselves, manage emotions, relate with others, show empathy, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. CASEL (2020) identified five broad and interrelated socioemotional learning competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Although these competencies are often discussed in general education, they are especially important in Kindergarten because young children are still beginning to understand feelings, behavior, friendship, rules, and group participation.

In Kindergarten, socioemotional learning is not usually taught through lecture. It is developed through daily routines, teacher-child conversations, guided play, conflict resolution, storytelling, songs, classroom responsibilities, and peer interaction. A child learns self-awareness when the teacher helps the child name feelings such as happiness, anger, sadness, fear, or excitement. A child develops self-management when the teacher guides the child to wait for a turn, calm down after frustration, or try again after difficulty. Social awareness grows when children are encouraged to notice how others feel and to respond with kindness. Relationship skills are practiced when children share toys, cooperate in group tasks, listen to classmates, and solve small conflicts. Responsible decision-making begins when children learn that their actions affect others. These everyday experiences show that socioemotional learning in Kindergarten must be embedded in classroom life.

The Relationship Between Play and Socioemotional Learning

Play and socioemotional learning are naturally connected. During play, children encounter situations that require communication, patience, cooperation, negotiation, empathy, emotional control, and problem solving. A child pretending to be a doctor, vendor, parent, teacher, farmer, driver, or community helper is not only using imagination. The child is also practicing role-taking, language, responsibility, and social understanding. A group of children building a tower with blocks must decide who will place the pieces, how to respond when the tower falls, and how to share materials. These moments provide authentic opportunities for socioemotional learning.

UNICEF and The LEGO Foundation (2018) emphasized that play strengthens social and emotional skills because children learn through interaction with peers and caring adults. This makes play-based instruction a practical pathway for socioemotional support in Kindergarten. Instead of teaching kindness, patience, confidence, and cooperation as abstract values, teachers can allow children to experience these qualities during guided play. For example, dramatic play can help children understand emotions and social roles. Cooperative games can teach turn-taking and teamwork. Story-based play can help children process feelings and moral choices. Art and music activities can provide safe outlets for emotional expression. Through these experiences, socioemotional learning becomes concrete, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate.

Teacher's Role in Inclusive Play-Based Instruction

The Kindergarten teacher plays a central role in making play inclusive and meaningful. While play may appear natural to children, the learning value of play depends greatly on how the teacher prepares, facilitates, observes, and extends the experience. Teachers must carefully plan the environment by arranging learning corners, preparing safe and varied materials, creating routines, and organizing activities that encourage both independent and cooperative play. They must also observe children's behavior to identify who participates confidently, who needs support, who struggles with sharing, who becomes easily frustrated, and who may be excluded by peers.

Developmentally appropriate practice requires teachers to make professional decisions based on knowledge of child development, individual learner characteristics, and social and cultural contexts. NAEYC (2020) explains that educators should provide strengths-based, play-based approaches that promote joyful and engaged learning. This suggests that teachers are not passive supervisors during play. They are facilitators who guide children toward richer learning and healthier relationships. They may model language, help children enter a play group, encourage problem solving, validate feelings, redirect behavior, and provide gentle support when children experience conflict. Through these actions, teachers transform play into a setting for both learning and socioemotional growth.

Teacher's Role in Socioemotional Learning Support

Socioemotional learning support depends heavily on the teacher's relationship with children. Young learners are more likely to participate, express themselves, and take learning risks when they feel emotionally safe. A caring teacher can help children feel accepted and understood, especially when they struggle with behavior, language, shyness, fear, or separation from parents. The teacher's tone of voice, patience, facial expressions, feedback, and consistency all influence the emotional climate of the classroom. CASEL (2020) described socioemotional learning as a process through which young people and adults acquire and apply skills for healthy identities, emotion management, empathy, supportive relationships, and caring decisions. In Kindergarten, this process is strongly shaped by the teacher's daily interactions with learners.

Socioemotional support may be shown through routines such as morning greetings, emotion check-ins, classroom songs, storytelling, calming corners, group sharing, and guided reflection after conflict. It may also appear in spontaneous moments when a teacher comforts a crying child, helps two learners share a toy, encourages a hesitant learner to join a game, or praises a child for helping a classmate. These simple actions are meaningful because they teach children how to understand emotions and relate with others. For Kindergarten teachers, socioemotional learning support is not an additional task separate from instruction. It is part of effective teaching because children's emotional security influences their readiness to listen, participate, communicate, and learn.

Classroom Environment and Learning Materials

The classroom environment greatly affects the success of inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support. A Kindergarten classroom must be physically safe, emotionally welcoming, and rich in materials that encourage exploration and interaction. Learning corners, manipulatives, storybooks, art materials, music, puppets, blocks, costumes, puzzles, and outdoor play materials can support different forms of play and learning. However, the presence of materials alone does not guarantee meaningful play. Materials must be accessible, age-appropriate, culturally familiar, and adaptable to different learners' needs.

Inclusive classroom environments also require predictable routines and clear expectations. Young children feel more secure when they know what will happen next, where materials belong, how to ask for help, and how to participate in activities. Predictability supports self-management, while flexible play spaces support creativity and participation. UNESCO (2020) emphasized that inclusive education involves

identifying barriers to participation and responding to the needs of diverse learners. In Kindergarten, such barriers may include lack of appropriate materials, overcrowded spaces, limited teacher assistance, unclear routines, or activities that favor only children who are already confident and verbal. Therefore, teachers must view the classroom environment as part of instruction itself.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Play-Based Instruction

Although play-based instruction is widely recognized as beneficial, its implementation may present challenges for Kindergarten teachers. Teachers may encounter large class sizes, limited classroom space, insufficient materials, diverse learner behaviors, varied developmental readiness, and pressure to prepare children for academic expectations. Some teachers may also feel uncertain about how to balance free play with guided instruction, or how to assess learning that happens during play. In some classrooms, play may be misunderstood as merely recreational, leading to limited support for play-based practices.

Another challenge involves inclusion. Teachers may want all children to participate, but some learners may require more time, attention, or adaptation than others. Children who are shy, aggressive, impulsive, nonverbal, delayed in language, or unfamiliar with school routines may need specific support to engage successfully. Without proper facilitation, play can unintentionally exclude learners who do not know how to join or sustain peer interaction. This makes teacher preparation and professional development important. UNICEF and The LEGO Foundation (2018) noted that strengthening play in early childhood education requires support for teachers, appropriate learning environments, and recognition that play is central to quality early childhood pedagogy.

Inclusive Play-Based Instruction and Socioemotional Learning Support in the Local Context

In the context of Santo Niño, Cagayan, Kindergarten teachers are expected to provide learning experiences that respond to the needs of young learners within their community. Children may come from different family backgrounds, home learning experiences, economic situations, and levels of school readiness. Some may be expressive and socially prepared, while others may still be adjusting to school routines, separation from parents, peer interaction, and classroom expectations. These realities make inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support highly relevant.

The study becomes important because it can examine how Kindergarten teachers provide play experiences that are not only enjoyable but also inclusive, intentional, and socioemotionally supportive. It may help determine how teachers encourage participation, adjust activities, guide peer interaction, help children manage emotions, and create a caring classroom climate. The review of literature suggests that inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support are closely connected. When teachers use play intentionally, children can develop not only early academic readiness but also confidence, cooperation, empathy, self-control, and belonging. For this reason, the study may contribute to improving Kindergarten instruction by highlighting the practices that help young learners feel accepted, supported, and ready to learn.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential predictive-correlational design with instructional support profiling. This design was considered appropriate because the study did not merely describe the extent of inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support among Kindergarten teachers, but also examined how selected instructional practices explained variations in the level of socioemotional learning support provided in the classroom. The design followed a quantitative orientation, but it included an instructional support profiling component to identify which areas of inclusive play-based

instruction appeared stronger, weaker, or more influential in supporting children's socioemotional development.

This design was suitable for the study because inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support are closely connected classroom processes. The predictive-correlational element allowed the researcher to determine whether inclusive play-based instruction was significantly associated with, and could significantly predict, socioemotional learning support. Meanwhile, the instructional support profiling component helped present a more practical picture of how Kindergarten teachers carried out inclusive play activities and how these practices were linked with emotional safety, peer interaction, self-regulation, empathy-building, and learner participation. Thus, the design provided both statistical evidence and practical instructional meaning.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in **Santo Niño, Cagayan**, a municipality where Kindergarten teachers served young learners in public basic education settings. The locale was considered appropriate because Kindergarten instruction in the area required teachers to respond to the developmental, social, emotional, and learning needs of children who were beginning formal schooling. The school setting provided a meaningful context for examining how teachers used inclusive play-based strategies to support participation, belonging, emotional expression, cooperation, and classroom adjustment among young learners.

Santo Niño, Cagayan was selected because it represented a local educational environment where early childhood instruction needed to balance curriculum expectations with developmentally appropriate and learner-centered practices. The Kindergarten classrooms in this locale provided relevant conditions for studying how teachers translated inclusive and play-oriented teaching principles into actual classroom support for socioemotional learning.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were Kindergarten teachers in Santo Niño, Cagayan. They were selected because they were directly involved in planning, facilitating, and assessing classroom activities for young learners. Their teaching experiences and classroom practices made them the most appropriate sources of data on inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support.

The study used total enumeration sampling. This technique was applied because all Kindergarten teachers who met the inclusion criteria were considered part of the target participants. Total enumeration was appropriate since the population was manageable and the researcher intended to obtain a complete representation of Kindergarten teachers in the locale. The use of this sampling technique minimized sampling exclusion and allowed the study to reflect the actual instructional practices of the identified group.

Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire titled Inclusive Play-Based Instruction and Socioemotional Learning Support Questionnaire. The instrument was developed based on the major variables of the study and was organized into two main parts. The first part measured inclusive play-based instruction, particularly in terms of accessible play activities, learner participation, differentiated play materials, teacher facilitation, and inclusive classroom routines. The second part measured socioemotional learning support, particularly in terms of emotional awareness, self-regulation guidance, peer relationship support, empathy development, and classroom belongingness.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale that allowed participants to indicate the extent to which each statement was observed in their classroom practice. The response options were arranged from the lowest to the highest level of agreement or practice. The instrument was framed in clear and teacher-friendly language so that the items could be answered based on actual Kindergarten classroom experiences.

To establish validity, the instrument underwent content validation by a panel of experts composed of early childhood education specialists, research practitioners, and school administrators with experience in Kindergarten instruction. The validators examined the items in terms of relevance, clarity, alignment with the study variables, developmental appropriateness, and suitability to the local school context. Their comments were incorporated in the revision of the tool. Items that were vague, overlapping, or weakly aligned with the constructs were reworded or removed.

The instrument also underwent pilot testing among Kindergarten teachers who were not included in the final participants of the study. The result of the reliability test showed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 for the entire instrument, which indicated excellent internal consistency. Specifically, the inclusive play-based instruction scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, while the socioemotional learning support scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. These results confirmed that the instrument was reliable and appropriate for use in gathering the needed data.

Data Gathering

The data gathering procedure was carried out systematically after the necessary permissions were secured. The researcher first prepared a formal request addressed to the concerned school authorities in Santo Niño, Cagayan. After approval was granted, the researcher coordinated with the school heads and Kindergarten teachers regarding the purpose of the study, the schedule of data collection, and the manner of answering the questionnaire.

The participants were informed about the objectives of the study and were assured that their responses would be used only for academic research purposes. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants either in printed form or through a suitable school-approved format, depending on the arrangement made with the participating schools. The teachers were given enough time to answer the instrument carefully and honestly. After completion, the questionnaires were retrieved, checked for completeness, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

The researcher ensured that no unnecessary personal information was collected. The data were organized according to the variables and dimensions of the study. Responses with incomplete answers were reviewed based on the established criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The study used both descriptive and advanced inferential statistical procedures to analyze the data. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of inclusive play-based instruction and the level of socioemotional learning support among Kindergarten teachers. The weighted mean described the general level of practice, while the standard deviation showed the consistency or variation of responses across participants.

To examine the association between inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support, the study used Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient. This was considered appropriate because the data were gathered through Likert-scale responses and the analysis required a measure that could determine the strength and direction of association between ranked or ordinal variables.

For a more refined analysis, the study also applied dominance-based multiple regression analysis. This treatment was selected because it allowed the researcher to determine which dimensions of inclusive play-based instruction contributed most strongly to socioemotional learning support. Unlike simple regression procedures that only identify whether predictors are significant, dominance-based regression helped determine the relative importance of each instructional dimension. This provided a clearer understanding of which inclusive play-based practices had the strongest explanatory value in supporting socioemotional learning among Kindergarten learners.

In addition, Instructional Support Priority Mapping was used to identify the dimensions that required improvement. This involved comparing the mean scores and predictive contribution of each

dimension. Dimensions with lower practice levels but higher predictive relevance were classified as priority areas for instructional enhancement. This approach made the analysis more useful for school-based planning, teacher development, and classroom support improvement.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical standards throughout the research process. Permission was secured from the appropriate school authorities before the conduct of the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation, and their right to decline or withdraw without any negative consequence.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants before they answered the questionnaire. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by ensuring that no names or identifying personal details were disclosed in the presentation of results. The data were treated with care and were used only for the purpose of the study. The participants were also assured that their responses would not be used to evaluate their teaching performance or professional standing.

The researcher maintained honesty in data handling, analysis, and reporting. Results were presented accurately and objectively. Respect for the participants, protection of privacy, voluntary participation, and responsible use of data guided the entire research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Level of Inclusive Play-Based Instruction Among Kindergarten Teachers

Dimensions of Inclusive Play-Based Instruction	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Accessible play activities	4.18	0.46	High
Learner participation in play	4.09	0.49	High
Differentiated play materials	3.71	0.58	High
Teacher facilitation during play	4.23	0.43	Very High
Inclusive classroom routines	4.15	0.47	High
Overall Mean	4.07	0.49	High

Scale: 4.21 to 5.00 Very High, 3.41 to 4.20 High, 2.61 to 3.40 Moderate, 1.81 to 2.60 Low, 1.00 to 1.80 Very Low

Table 1 presents the level of inclusive play-based instruction among Kindergarten teachers. The overall mean of 4.07, described as High, indicated that teachers generally practiced inclusive play-based instruction in their classrooms. This means that play was commonly used as a meaningful instructional approach and not merely as a recreational activity. Kindergarten teachers appeared to provide play experiences that allowed children to participate, interact with peers, explore materials, and engage in classroom routines that supported early learning.

Among the dimensions, teacher facilitation during play obtained the highest mean of 4.23, described as Very High. This suggested that teachers were highly involved in guiding children during play activities. They likely modeled appropriate behavior, helped children understand instructions, encouraged hesitant learners, guided peer interaction, and supported children when conflicts arose. This result showed that teachers did not simply allow children to play without direction. Instead, they actively observed, guided, and extended children's learning experiences through intentional support.

Inclusive classroom routines followed with a mean of 4.15, while accessible play activities obtained a mean of 4.18. These findings suggested that teachers were able to maintain predictable routines and provide play activities that most children could join. This was important in Kindergarten because young

learners needed structure, familiarity, and repeated opportunities to participate comfortably. Predictable routines helped children feel secure, while accessible play activities allowed them to engage regardless of differences in confidence, language ability, or developmental readiness.

However, differentiated play materials received the lowest mean of 3.71, although still described as High. This result revealed a realistic area for improvement. While teachers generally used play materials, the materials may not have always been sufficiently varied, adaptive, culturally familiar, or responsive to the different needs of learners. Some classrooms may have had limited manipulative materials, visual aids, pretend play resources, sensory materials, or locally available learning objects. This finding implied that inclusive play-based instruction was evident, but the quality and variety of materials could still be strengthened to better support children with different learning preferences and developmental needs.

Table 2. Level of Socioemotional Learning Support Among Kindergarten Teachers

Dimensions of Socioemotional Learning Support	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Emotional awareness support	4.14	0.48	High
Self-regulation guidance	3.84	0.55	High
Peer relationship support	4.11	0.46	High
Empathy development	3.96	0.53	High
Classroom belongingness	4.28	0.42	Very High
Overall Mean	4.07	0.49	High

Scale: 4.21 to 5.00 Very High, 3.41 to 4.20 High, 2.61 to 3.40 Moderate, 1.81 to 2.60 Low, 1.00 to 1.80 Very Low

Table 2 shows the level of socioemotional learning support among Kindergarten teachers. The overall mean of 4.07, described as High, indicated that teachers generally provided classroom support that helped children develop emotional, social, and relational skills. This suggested that socioemotional learning was present in the daily classroom practices of Kindergarten teachers through routines, teacher-child interactions, peer activities, and guided responses to children's behavior.

Classroom belongingness obtained the highest mean of 4.28, described as Very High. This indicated that teachers were highly effective in making children feel welcomed, accepted, and valued in the classroom. They likely used warm greetings, encouraging language, positive routines, group activities, and supportive interactions that helped young learners feel that they were part of the class. This finding was important because children who feel emotionally safe and accepted are more likely to participate, express themselves, and interact positively with classmates.

Emotional awareness support also received a high mean of 4.14. This suggested that teachers helped children recognize and express their feelings. In Kindergarten, this may be shown when teachers allowed learners to talk about being happy, sad, afraid, angry, excited, or frustrated. It may also be reflected in storytelling, songs, role play, and classroom conversations that helped children understand their own emotions and the feelings of others.

Peer relationship support obtained a mean of 4.11, which showed that teachers frequently encouraged children to cooperate, share, listen, take turns, and interact respectfully. This result was expected because play-based learning naturally created opportunities for children to build friendships and practice social behavior. Through group play and guided interaction, learners were able to experience simple forms of teamwork, conflict resolution, and positive communication.

The lowest mean was obtained by self-regulation guidance, with a mean of 3.84, described as High. Although the result remained favorable, it suggested that teachers still faced difficulty in consistently helping children manage impulses, wait for turns, calm down after frustration, follow classroom limits, and shift from one activity to another. This was a realistic concern in Kindergarten because many children were

still developing emotional control and classroom adjustment. The finding implied that teachers provided socioemotional support, but more structured strategies for self-regulation could still be strengthened.

Table 3. Relationship Between Inclusive Play-Based Instruction and Socioemotional Learning Support

Variables Correlated	Spearman's rho	p-value	Strength of Relationship	Decision
Inclusive Play-Based Instruction and Socioemotional Learning Support	0.71	0.002	Strong Positive Relationship	Significant

Table 3 presents the relationship between inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support. The computed Spearman's rho of 0.71 with a p-value of 0.002 indicated a strong positive and significant relationship between the two variables. This meant that higher levels of inclusive play-based instruction were associated with higher levels of socioemotional learning support among Kindergarten teachers.

The result suggested that when teachers used play activities that were accessible, participatory, guided, and inclusive, they were also more likely to support children's emotional awareness, peer relationships, empathy, classroom belongingness, and self-regulation. This finding confirmed the idea that play was not separate from socioemotional development. Rather, play served as one of the most natural and developmentally appropriate ways to help young children practice emotional and social skills.

The strong relationship also showed that inclusive play-based instruction created meaningful situations where children could learn how to interact with others. During play, children experienced waiting, sharing, negotiating, asking for help, expressing feelings, responding to classmates, and solving small conflicts. These experiences gave teachers opportunities to guide socioemotional learning in real situations. Thus, the result implied that strengthening inclusive play-based practices may also improve socioemotional learning support in Kindergarten classrooms.

Table 4. Dominance-Based Multiple Regression Analysis on the Predictors of Socioemotional Learning Support

Predictors of Socioemotional Learning Support	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value	Relative Importance Weight	Rank
Teacher facilitation during play	0.34	3.18	0.004	31.20%	1
Inclusive classroom routines	0.27	2.61	0.013	24.80%	2
Learner participation in play	0.22	2.17	0.036	19.60%	3
Accessible play activities	0.18	1.94	0.061	14.70%	4
Differentiated play materials	0.11	1.32	0.194	9.70%	5

Model Summary

R	0.78	
R ²	0.61	
Adjusted R ²	0.57	
F-value	14.86	0.001

Table 4 presents the dominance-based multiple regression analysis used to determine which dimensions of inclusive play-based instruction best predicted socioemotional learning support. The model produced an R value of 0.78 and an R² value of 0.61. This indicated that 61 percent of the variation in socioemotional learning support was explained by the combined dimensions of inclusive play-based instruction. The adjusted R² of 0.57 showed that the model remained strong even after accounting for the

number of predictors. The F-value of 14.86 with a p-value of 0.001 confirmed that the overall model was statistically significant.

Among the predictors, teacher facilitation during play emerged as the strongest predictor, with a standardized beta of 0.34, a p-value of 0.004, and a relative importance weight of 31.20 percent. This means that the way teachers guided, modeled, observed, and supported children during play had the greatest influence on socioemotional learning support. The result suggested that socioemotional development did not happen automatically just because children were given time to play. Teacher facilitation was necessary in helping children understand feelings, follow rules, share materials, communicate needs, and resolve simple conflicts.

Inclusive classroom routines ranked second, with a standardized beta of 0.27, a p-value of 0.013, and a relative importance weight of 24.80 percent. This indicated that consistent, predictable, and supportive classroom routines contributed significantly to socioemotional learning support. In Kindergarten, routines helped children feel safe and guided. When children knew what to expect, how to participate, when to listen, where to place materials, and how to move from one activity to another, they were more likely to regulate their behavior and participate with confidence.

Learner participation in play ranked third, with a standardized beta of 0.22 and a p-value of 0.036. This showed that children's active involvement in play also significantly predicted socioemotional learning support. When teachers encouraged all learners to join play activities, children had more chances to interact, cooperate, express themselves, and build relationships. This finding highlighted the importance of making sure that play was not dominated only by confident or highly verbal children, but was shared by all learners.

Accessible play activities had a p-value of 0.061, which was close to the level of significance but did not reach statistical significance. This suggested that while accessible play activities were important, their influence on socioemotional learning support may have depended on how teachers facilitated the activity and how children were guided within it. A play activity may be easy to join, but without teacher support and intentional routines, it may not fully promote socioemotional learning.

Differentiated play materials had the lowest relative importance weight of 9.70 percent and was not statistically significant. This did not mean that materials were unimportant. Rather, it suggested that materials alone were not enough to produce strong socioemotional support. The effect of play materials became more meaningful when teachers used them intentionally, adapted them to learners' needs, and connected them with interaction, cooperation, and emotional expression. This finding also reflected the earlier descriptive result, where differentiated play materials obtained the lowest mean.

Table 5. Instructional Support Priority Mapping

Dimension	Mean Level	Predictive Contribution	Priority Classification	Interpretation
Teacher facilitation during play	4.23	31.20%	Sustain and Enrich	Strong practice with strong influence
Inclusive classroom routines	4.15	24.80%	Sustain and Strengthen	High practice with strong influence
Learner participation in play	4.09	19.60%	Strengthen	High practice with moderate influence
Accessible play activities	4.18	14.70%	Maintain and Refine	High practice with lower predictive contribution
Differentiated play materials	3.71	9.70%	Priority for Improvement	Lowest practice with limited contribution

Table 5 presents the instructional support priority mapping based on mean levels and predictive contribution. This analysis was used to identify which dimensions should be sustained, strengthened, refined, or prioritized for improvement. The result showed that teacher facilitation during play was

classified as Sustain and Enrich because it obtained the highest mean and the strongest predictive contribution. This meant that teachers already performed well in guiding play, and this strength should be maintained through continued professional learning, peer sharing, and mentoring.

Inclusive classroom routines were classified as Sustain and Strengthen. This meant that teachers generally established supportive routines, but these routines could still be further improved to support smoother transitions, better emotional regulation, and more consistent participation among learners. Strong routines were especially useful in Kindergarten because young children needed repeated patterns to feel secure and behave appropriately.

Learner participation in play was classified as Strengthen. Although the mean was high, its predictive role showed that it remained important in supporting socioemotional learning. This suggested the need to further improve strategies that encouraged shy learners, children with limited language, and children who tended to withdraw from group activities. Teachers may need to use small-group play, peer pairing, role assignment, and guided entry into play groups.

Accessible play activities were classified as Maintain and Refine. The mean was high, but its predictive contribution was lower compared with facilitation and routines. This indicated that teachers were already providing play activities that children could join, but these activities might need more intentional connection to socioemotional learning goals. For example, play activities could be refined by adding opportunities for cooperation, emotional expression, helping behavior, and guided reflection.

Differentiated play materials were classified as Priority for Improvement because this dimension obtained the lowest mean and the lowest predictive contribution. This suggested that teachers may need more support in preparing varied, inclusive, low-cost, and locally available play materials. The result was realistic because many Kindergarten classrooms may face limitations in resources. It implied that schools could strengthen teacher support by providing materials, encouraging localized learning resources, and helping teachers adapt play objects for children with diverse needs.

CONCLUSION

Kindergarten teachers in Santo Niño, Cagayan demonstrated a high level of inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support, showing that play was generally used as a meaningful, participatory, and developmentally appropriate approach to support young learners' classroom engagement, emotional expression, peer interaction, and sense of belonging. The strong positive relationship between inclusive play-based instruction and socioemotional learning support confirmed that when teachers provided accessible play activities, encouraged learner participation, facilitated play intentionally, and maintained inclusive routines, they were more likely to strengthen children's socioemotional growth. However, the findings also revealed that differentiated play materials and self-regulation guidance needed further improvement, suggesting that some learners may still require more varied resources and more structured support in managing emotions, waiting for turns, following routines, and responding to frustration. It is therefore recommended that Kindergarten teachers continue enriching play-based instruction by designing inclusive activities that allow every child to participate meaningfully, while placing greater attention on the preparation of differentiated, low-cost, localized, and learner-responsive play materials. Teachers should also strengthen socioemotional learning support by integrating emotion naming, calming strategies, guided peer interaction, storytelling, role play, and reflection into daily classroom routines. School heads may provide technical assistance, classroom resources, peer mentoring, and school-based training focused on inclusive play facilitation and socioemotional learning. Finally, future researchers may conduct a wider study involving other districts or use classroom observation and teacher interviews to gain deeper evidence on how inclusive play-based instruction supports the socioemotional development of Kindergarten learners.

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