



JOURNALISM FOR PRIMARY GRADES: A Play-Based Curriculum

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December 2024

Abstract

This research explores the potential of integrating playful journalism activities into the Department of Education (DepEd) curriculum for primary grades (Kindergarten and Grades 1-3) in the Philippines. Using an Appreciative Inquiry approach, a study that focuses on discovering the positive facets of an organizational event or activity and identifies the mechanisms to enhance or improve them (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cram, 2010). This study involved 15 teachers and 30 learners across diverse locations within DepEd divisions. *The Discovery Phase* employed focus groups, student observations, and interviews to identify existing playful learning practices and student preferences and identify and appreciate the positive aspects of the system. *The Dream Phase* utilized World Café workshops, photovoice activities, and collaborative story writing to co-create ideal visions for a play-based journalism curriculum. It envisions and articulates the desired future state for the system. *The Design Phase* or the development of strategies and action plans to bring the desired future state of life. It focuses on discovering what's working well and building upon those strengths to create a positive future. *The Destiny Phase* or the implementation of the desired changes. Results revealed the prevalence of storytelling, communication, and real-world awareness activities in existing playful learning practices. Both teachers and students expressed enthusiasm for integrating journalism concepts through activities like mock press conferences, news scavenger hunts, and collaborative reporting projects. The research highlights the curriculum of play-based journalism to nurture critical thinking,

ethical information consumption, and active citizenship in young learners. The co-created visions showcase a future where children engage in investigative projects, interview local heroes, and run student newspapers, becoming empowered young minds actively contributing to their communities. Based on these findings, the paper recommends integrating play-based journalism into the DepEd curriculum, providing comprehensive resources for teachers, and forging partnerships with external stakeholders to enrich the learning experience. By leveraging the natural curiosity and playfulness of young Filipinos, we can cultivate a generation of informed and engaged citizens equipped to tackle the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Keywords: Journalism, Play-based, Curriculum design, Department of Education, Appreciative Inquiry

Introduction

Play-based journalism offers a mechanism for individuals to receive training and exposure to the field of journalism without sacrificing their time and effort in conceptualizing writing and reporting. By engaging in enjoyable activities, learners can actively participate in journalism. To cultivate an early interest in journalism and ensure its continuation throughout high school and college, it is important to motivate a greater number of students. A significant number of individuals opt for journalism as their prospective career, as stated by Farid (2023). The apparent popularity of journalism requires the essential to explain its significance to young students.

This type of curriculum teaches basic ethics that make administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders want to be part of these kinds of programs. The goal is to give elementary learners the chance to experience journalism at a young age so that they may be able to use the knowledge and experience to write and stand up for their opinions as they get older. Journalism education allows students to focus on service learning, which is a pedagogical concept relating to developing self-efficacy as part of the doing process and becoming a member of a democratic society by developing a value for participation (Ball, Procopio, Goering, Dong, & Bodary, 2016).

Journalism education is important for a democratic society because students involved in scholastic journalism “follow and engage with important community issues and that by informing their audiences about these issues, they perform civic service and learn to effectively contribute to the civic process” (Bobkowski & Miller, 2016, p. 530). In the tapestry of a child's development, imagination holds the brush, and play becomes the canvas. Through this dance of creativity, children explore the world, grapple with ideas, and discover their voices. Yet, amidst this symphony of learning, a crucial instrument often remains unsung: journalism. While the Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd) emphasizes holistic development, fostering critical thinking and communication skills, the formal introduction to journalism remains relegated to later years. This study aims to bridge this gap by proposing a revolutionary play-based journalism curriculum for primary grades.

Traditionally, journalism education begins in high school, often presented as a technical skill set rather than a foundational pillar of citizenship. This delayed exposure overlooks the critical window of opportunity in primary grades, where children's innate curiosity, narrative prowess, and love for exploration can be harnessed to cultivate a generation of informed and engaged citizens. DepEd's Curriculum Framework emphasizes the power of "learning through activity," yet existing frameworks lack specific models for integrating media literacy and journalistic practices into the playful landscape of primary education.

This research addresses this critical gap by crafting a model curriculum that empowers young minds to transform from playful observers to responsible storytellers. By integrating journalistic principles into familiar classroom activities like role-playing, storytelling, and creative writing, we can equip children with the tools to navigate the ever-evolving media landscape. Imagine classrooms buzzing with mock press conferences, young reporters interviewing school heroes like the librarian or cafeteria chef, and classrooms transformed into mini newsrooms where children curate vibrant school newspapers.

This is not merely a whimsical endeavor. Play-based learning, as endorsed by DepEd, is demonstrably effective. It fosters deeper understanding, ignites critical thinking, and cultivates essential skills like collaboration and communication. Weaving journalism into this tapestry enhances these benefits, empowering children to become critical consumers of information, responsible news producers, and active participants in shaping their communities.

The absence of a dedicated play-based journalism curriculum in primary grades represents a missed opportunity to nurture a generation of informed and engaged young citizens. This study seeks to fill this void by developing a model that seamlessly integrates journalistic principles into existing learning frameworks. By equipping children with the tools to analyze information, tell compelling stories, and navigate the media landscape ethically, we can empower them to become not just passive consumers, but active contributors to a vibrant and informed citizenry.

Thus, the study explored the experiences of school heads, teachers, and learners to undergo the *Discovery Phase* of Appreciative Inquiry, focusing on identifying strengths and existing positive practices within the DepEd framework. By exploring successful playful learning activities, this will lead us to the discovery of fertile ground upon which to build the journalism curriculum. Then, this will embody the *Dream Phase*, envisioning possibilities, and ideal outcomes. By focusing on adaptation and enhancement of existing activities, we encourage creative collaboration and build upon the strong foundation of play to cultivate the desired journalistic skills.

Specifically, the study answered the question: *What existing playful learning practices in DepEd-accredited primary classrooms can be leveraged to foster journalistic skills and engagement in young learners (Kindergarten-Grade3)? And how can storytelling, role-playing, and other playful activities be adapted and enhanced to nurture critical thinking, ethical information consumption, and responsible news production in young children through a journalism-infused curriculum?*

Methodology

Research Design

This research utilized an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) design following Cooperrider & Srivastva (1987) and Watkins & Mohr (2001) model, emphasizing the *Discovery and Dream phases* to develop a play-based journalism curriculum for primary grades in the Philippines especially in the Department of Education.

Discovery Phase

Primary or Elementary school teachers (Kindergarten and Grades 1-3): 15 experienced teachers from diverse locations and 3 DepEd divisions of Northern Mindanao, Region X. Specifically, the Division of Malaybalay City, the Division of Valencia City, and the Division of Bukidnon. Learners (Kindergarten and Grades 1-3): 30 learners across participating schools to capture their perspectives on playful learning and current classroom activities.

In collecting the data, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is conducted, small group interviews with teachers to explore existing playful learning practices in their classrooms, focusing on activities that promote storytelling and narrative construction, communication and critical thinking skills, collaboration and active participation, exploration of real-world issues and social awareness. Field notes and audio recordings will be used (Emerson, Fetterman, & Shaw, 2011).

Learners' observation followed as participatory observations (Spradley, 2016) during playful learning activities, noting how children engage with information, share perspectives, and demonstrate critical thinking skills. Then, student interviews such as individual interviews with children using open-ended questions to understand their preferred learning styles, favorite classroom activities, and their perception of information and news, (Kvale, 2007). Finally, document analysis in reviewing DepEd curriculum documents and existing playful learning resources (Creswell & Miller, 2000) to identify potential integration points for journalism concepts.

Dream Phase

The same teachers and learners are included in the Discovery Phase. Curriculum developers, education supervisors, and education specialists: 5-10 professionals involved in DepEd curriculum development and familiar with play-based learning.

In data collection, World Café Workshops is utilized as an approach which is a series of interactive sessions where participants brainstorm and visualize ideal aspects of a play-based journalism curriculum, following (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). Each table focuses on specific areas, such as: adapting existing playful learning activities to incorporate journalistic skills, designing new activities that promote critical thinking and responsible news production, creating age-appropriate resources and assessment strategies.

Then, learners are involved in a photovoice activity/approach (Wang & Burris, 2017) to capture their vision of the ideal journalism curriculum through drawings, photos, and written descriptions. Collaborative story writing is also included as a guided group story-writing session where

participants co-create narratives about children engaging in exciting and impactful journalism activities through (Gómez, Reyes, & Gil, 2011).

This Appreciative Inquiry-based research design prioritizes discovery of existing strengths and collaborative dream-weaving to envision a playful and empowering journalism curriculum for young Filipinos. It fosters teacher and student voices, leading to a curriculum that builds upon a foundation of joy and exploration to nurture a generation of responsible and engaged young journalists.

Design Phase

The same teachers and learners are included in the Discovery Phase. This phase focused on discovering what's working well and building upon those strengths to create a positive future.

In gathering the data, the participants collect the photo stories and analyze them for recurring themes, emotions, and perspectives on positive classroom experiences. (Chen & Brown, 2021). Story telling circles with surprise props are also employed where they observe the storytelling dynamics and collect the final collaborative story. Analyze the themes, language choices, and use of props to understand the children's collective perception of positive experiences. (Sarah Adams and David Lee (2019).

Destiny Phase

The same teachers and learners are included in the Destiny Phase. Curriculum developers, education supervisors, and education specialists: 5-10 professionals involved in DepEd curriculum development and familiar with play-based learning.

In the gathering of data, a combination of multiple data collection methods (e.g., photo stories, interviews, storytelling) for a richer understanding of children's perceptions and experiences. (Johnson, 2023).

Data Gathering Procedure, Instruments, and Analysis

The researchers used focus group discussion (FGD) prompts for the group interview, while interview guides were utilized for the one-on-one in-person discussion. The FGD prompts and interview guides underwent validation from a panel of experts with concentration on language, methodology, and content.

Before the conduct of the study, all participants are ensured with an informed consent form and adhere to ethical research guidelines following (Creswell, 2018). The balance across participating schools, teachers, and learners are also ensured for fair representation.

The use of thematic analysis is utilized to identify key themes and patterns across all data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Triangulate data from different sources (interviews, observations, documents) to enhance trustworthiness and validity (Bryman, 2012). The research team collaboratively analyzed the data in *identifying the most promising playful learning practices for adapting to journalism education* (grounded theory approach - Strauss & Corbin, 1990), *in developing prototypes for engaging and effective journalism activities for primary grades* (design thinking approach -

Brown, 2008), and crafting a conceptual framework for a play-based journalism curriculum (constructivist approach - Bruner, 1996).

Results and Discussion

The collected survey data on the play-based journalism curriculum aspects of the program are analyzed below from several perspectives. These include analysis of the participants' responses on need assessment, curriculum design, curriculum review process and alignment, and gaps in the curriculum.

Needs Assessment

Children in the Philippines' primary grades exhibit a natural curiosity and desire to explore the world around them. Play serves as their primary language of learning, fostering engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking. However, the current DepEd curriculum in primary grades often overlooks the immense potential of play-based learning, prioritizing traditional didactic methods that focus on rote memorization and standardized testing. This creates a critical gap in children's learning experience, failing to address their need for active exploration and meaningful engagement with information.

While DepEd's Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) for primary grades emphasize skills like communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving, the opportunities for fostering these skills through play-based learning remain limited. The current curriculum often relies on worksheets, textbooks, and standardized assessments, leaving little room for imaginative exploration and collaborative activities that naturally nurture these competencies through play. This underutilization of playful learning methods hinders children's potential to develop essential skills in a way that is both engaging and effective.

Integrating play-based journalism activities into the DepEd curriculum holds the potential to address this critical gap. By weaving elements of storytelling, role-playing, and investigative reporting into existing frameworks, this approach can provide a natural platform for developing the competencies outlined in the MELCs. Through playful exploration of the world of journalism, children can hone their communication skills by interviewing peers, crafting news reports, and engaging in collaborative projects. The act of exploring real-world issues through play fosters critical thinking, while ethical reporting practices nurture responsible information consumption. This playful approach provides a more stimulating and meaningful way for children to develop the essential skills outlined in the DepEd curriculum, preparing them for future success in education and life.

Addressing these needs and implementing play-based journalism through curriculum revisions and teacher training, we can unleash the immense potential of Filipino children, empowering them to become not just passive learners, but active explorers, storytellers, and responsible citizens of the world.

Furthermore, it is recommended that students begin training as early as kindergarten to refine their abilities and develop greater self-assurance in their abilities. This should be taken into consideration to provide

opportunities for all learners to participate and be involved in this kind of activity. Observations show that learner participants in campus journalism have little prior experience and background knowledge of the activity because, in addition to being new to the program, they did not receive any training or practice in earlier grade levels.

Curriculum Design

Children develop confidence in expressing their voice, engage in collaborative reporting projects, and demonstrate understanding of ethical news consumption and responsible citizenship, becoming empowered young journalists ready to explore their world more critically and actively.

This ladder model highlights the step-by-step development of skills and activities. It promotes a sense of progression and continuous learning while ensuring age-appropriateness and engagement. By implementing this playful journalism framework, we can cultivate a generation of informed, empowered, and responsible young citizens in the Philippines.

Figure 1 shows the heart of a play-based curriculum that illustrates the general data of results collected from the responses, needs assessment, observations, and interviews

It shows the activities that can be employed in the classroom and

The foundation in storytelling that can engage in collaborative storytelling activities like class novels, puppet shows, and dramatizations to foster narrative construction, communication skills, and teamwork. Exploring information in play such as "scavenger hunts" for local news and resources, play "reporter bingo" with current events, and create mock press conferences to develop information analysis and responsible news consumption. Creative expression and imagination can encourage drawing and writing news stories about fictional events, create "mystery boxes" with clues to spark investigative thinking, and conduct classroom interviews to build communication and storytelling skills.

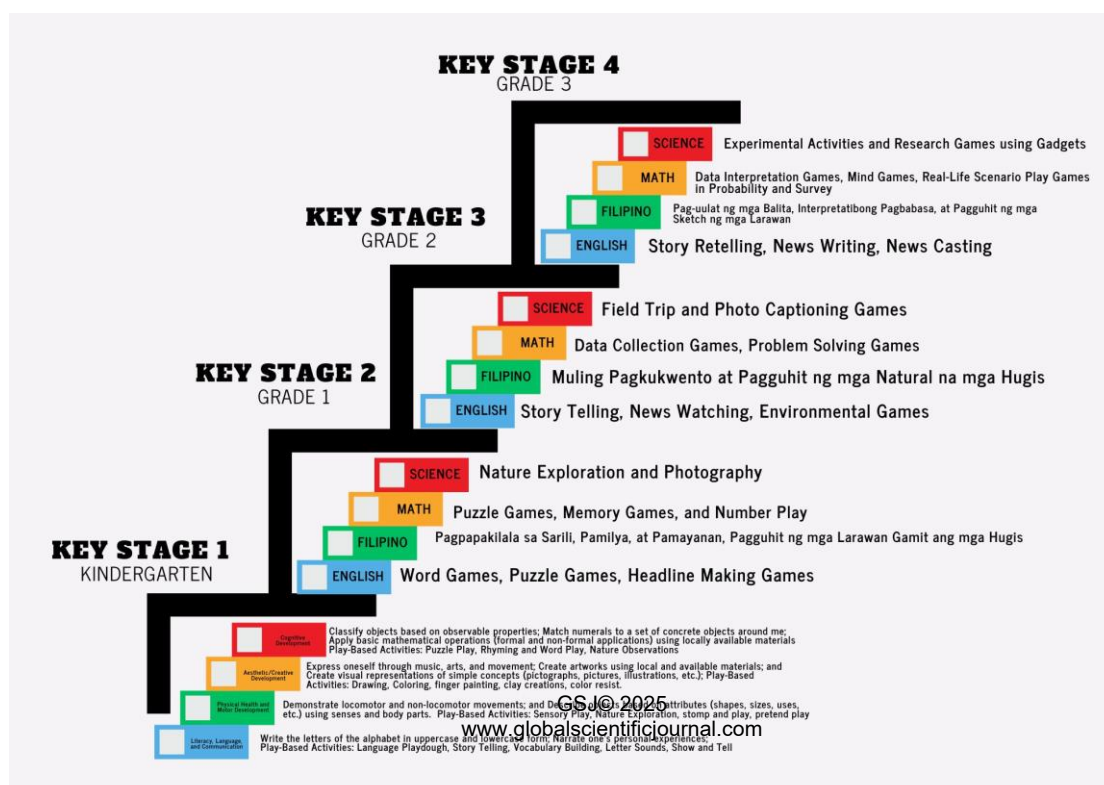


Figure 1. *The Laddered Curriculum Framework of the Play-Based Journalism Curriculum.*

The competencies followed in the framework of the Department of Education can help children in building and engaging narratives through collaborative storytelling activities. Analyzing information and identifying news sources through playful games and exercises. Expressing ideas creatively through drawing, writing, and role-playing in journalism-themed activities. The foundation activities are designed for children which are adaptable to their developmental stage and increasing complexity with age.

Curriculum Review and Alignment

The Play-Based Curriculum has undergone a comprehensive review and evaluation to ensure its alignment with the Most Learning Competencies outlined by the Department of Education. This innovative curriculum not only caters to the educational needs of primary grade students but also strategically integrates play-based activities designed to meet the specific competencies set forth by the Department. The curriculum's focus on play-based learning is particularly noteworthy, as it not only engages young learners but also addresses the evolving educational landscape. The play-based activities are thoughtfully designed to align with the journalism category for higher grades, emphasizing foundational skills in research, critical thinking, and communication, setting a strong groundwork for future academic pursuits.

Within this curriculum, play-based activities are tailored to introduce primary grade students to the fundamentals of journalism in a manner that is both enjoyable and educational. By aligning these activities with the expectations of higher grades, the curriculum not only prepares students for more advanced learning but also ensures a seamless progression in their understanding of journalistic concepts. The play-based approach fosters a love for learning and encourages students to explore their creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills within the context of journalism, ultimately contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals who are equipped to meet the Most Learning Competencies of the Department of Education.

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Subjects	Kindergarten			Grade I		Grade II		Grade III		Journalism Category for Higher Grades
	Domains	Competency	Play-based Activity	Competency	Play-based Activity	Competency	Play-based Activity	Competency	Play-based Activity	
SCIENCE	Aesthetic Creative Development	Express oneself through music, arts, and movements.	Drawing, Coloring, finger painting, clay creations, color resist.					Describe different objects based on their characteristics (e.g. Shape, Weight, Volume, Ease of flow)	Experimental Activities and Research Games using Gadgets	Science and Technology Writing Photojournalism, Editorial Cartooning, Feature Writing
MATHEMATICS	Motor Development	Describe objects based on attributes (shapes, sizes, uses, etc.)	Stomp and Play, Play Pretend	Sorts, classifies, and organizes data in tabular form and presents this into a pictograph without scales.	Puzzle Games, Memory Games, and Number Play	Infers and interprets data presented in a pictograph without and with scales.	Data Collection Games, Problem Solving Games	describes events in real-life situations using the phrases "sure to happen," "likely to happen", "equally likely to happen", "unlikely to happen", and "impossible to happen"	Data Interpretation Games, Mind Games, Real-life Scenario Play, Games in Probability and Survey	
FILIPINO	Language, Literacy, and Communication	Write the letters of the alphabet in upper case and lower case form; Narrates one's personal experiences	Language Playdough, Story Telling, Vocabulary Building, Letter Sounds, Show and Tell	Naisapahayag ang sariling ideya/damdamin o reaksiyon nangkol sa napakalaking teksto/pang-imormasyon	Pagpapalabas Sa Sarili, Pamilya, at Pamayanan, Pagguhit ng mga Larawan gamit ang Hugis	Naindut nang pasalita ang mga napalaganan sa radio	Muling Paglakuwento at Pagguhit ng mga Natural na mga Hugis	Naisasalaysay muli ang binasang teksto nang may tamang pagkaka-sunod-sunod sa tulong ng balangkas.	Pag-ulat ng mga Balita, Interpretatibong Pagbabasa at Pagguhit ng mga Sketch ng Larawan	News Writing, Editorial Writing Feature Writing, Radio Broadcasting
ENGLISH				Give one's reaction to an event or issues.	Word Games, Puzzle Games, Headline Making Games	Participate in generating ideas through prewriting activities.	Story Telling, News Watching, Environmental Games	Present information in varied artistic ways (e.g. role playing, show and tell, radio play/podcast/broadcast reporting poster presentations)	Storytelling, News Writing, News Casting	

Figure 2. *The Evaluated Most Learning Competencies of the Department of Education within the Play-Based Journalism Curriculum.*

The presented table serves as a comprehensive roadmap, delineating the strategic alignment of play-based activities with the competencies in four distinct subject areas—mathematics, science, English, and Filipino. Each subject is intricately connected to the development of skills crucial for various journalism categories, including editorial writing, feature writing, sports writing, cartooning, and science and technology writing. In the realm of mathematics, play-based activities likely target problem-solving skills and logical reasoning, essential foundations for journalistic pursuits such as editorial and feature writing. Simultaneously, science-based activities cater to hands-on experiments, fostering scientific inquiry and critical thinking, directly contributing to the competencies required for science and technology writing within the field of journalism.

For language-centric subjects like English and Filipino, the table likely showcases play-based activities designed to enhance language proficiency, effective communication, and creative expression. These activities, in turn, nurture the necessary skills for editorial and feature writing, as well as cartooning. By mapping out the symbiotic relationship between play-based learning and journalism competencies across diverse subjects, the table offers a concise yet insightful guide for educators and stakeholders, emphasizing the holistic development of skills necessary for success in various journalistic categories.

Gaps in the Curriculum

Despite its promising potential, the proposed play-based journalism curriculum also presents opportunities for improvement and gap analysis. This evaluation highlights three key phases for assessing its effectiveness and informing future development, as shown in Figure 3 describing the gaps and improvements in the curriculum.

In the curriculum implementation and teacher preparedness, assessing the readiness of teachers and schools for implementing the curriculum. Are

teacher training programs adequately equipping educators with the skills and resources needed to deliver playful journalism activities effectively? Do schools have access to necessary materials and technology to support these activities? It will always follow in conducting other needs assessments for teachers, learners, and schools, providing targeted training programs on playful learning and journalism concepts, and ensuring adequate resource allocation to support implementation.

Then, evaluating the alignment between the designed activities and the targeted competencies outlined in the DepEd MELCs. Are the activities sufficiently challenging and varied to ensure progressive development of essential skills across grade levels? It will now result in continuously refining the activities through pilot testing and classroom observations, ensuring they cater to diverse learning styles and effectively foster the intended competencies. Conducting regular assessment by subject matter experts and educators to ensure alignment with DepEd standards.

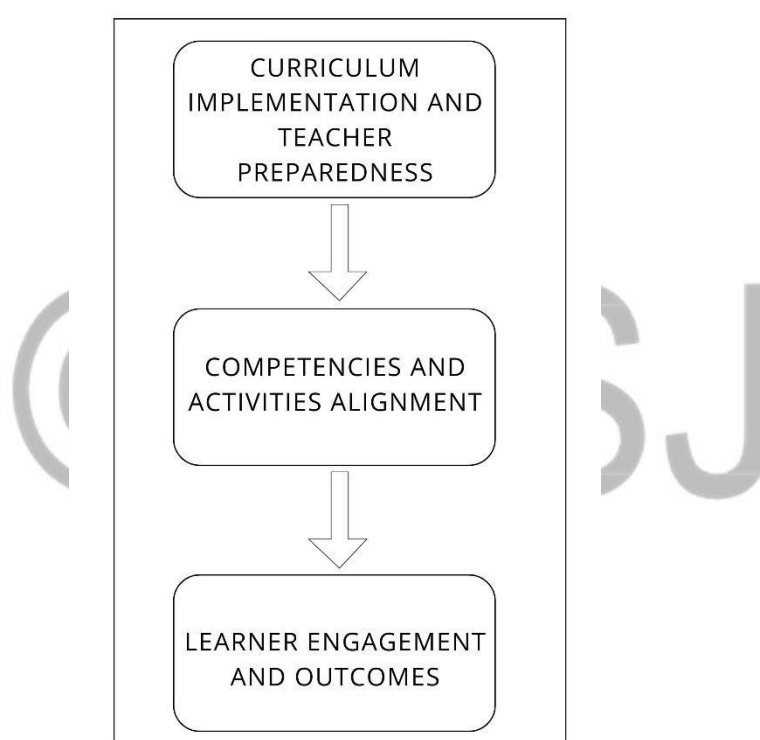


Figure 3. *The Three Phases of Evaluation within the Play-Based Journalism Curriculum.*

In the learner engagement and outcomes, measuring the impact of the play-based journalism curriculum on student engagement, learning outcomes, and transferable skills. How effectively does the curriculum foster critical thinking, communication, and responsible citizenship in young learners? Then it will result in the implementation of a multi-faceted assessment strategy using standardized tests, teacher observations, student self-reflections, and projects evaluating students' ability to apply journalistic skills in real-world scenarios. Analyzing data from these assessments to continuously adapt and improve the curriculum based on learners' needs and progress.

Prioritizing these three phases of evaluation, we can continuously bridge the gaps within the play-based journalism curriculum, ensuring its effectiveness in empowering young Filipinos with the skills to navigate the media landscape critically and contribute meaningfully as informed citizens of the world.

Recommendations

Embracing a playful journalism in the Department of Education can be achieved by considering the integration of a play-based journalism curriculum into primary grades (Kindergarten & Grades 1-3) through developing age-appropriate learning modules which can build upon existing DepEd frameworks, incorporating playful activities like storytelling, role-playing, and simulations to introduce journalistic concepts, critical thinking, and ethical information consumption. Piloting the journalism curriculum in select schools can help implement the curriculum in diverse settings that will potentially provide valuable data for refinement and adaptation before wider rollout. Providing teacher training and resources can equip more teachers with skills to effectively implement the playful journalism curriculum, fostering confidence and creativity in delivering these activities.

The participation of external stakeholders can potentially enrich the curriculum and provide real-world learning opportunities. DepEd should consider partnerships with media organizations such as journalists and media professionals who can visit classrooms, mentor student projects, and offer valuable insights into the world of journalism. Community organizations such as local NGOs, environmental groups, and social initiatives can collaborate with students on investigative projects, raising awareness about community issues and inspiring action. Also, higher education institutions such as nearby universities with journalism programs can offer internship opportunities for teachers and support curriculum development through research and expertise. Empowering education specialists and teacher training institutions can help ensure successful implementation and ongoing development of the playful journalism curriculum. Ongoing workshops and sessions can support teachers in honing their skills, sharing best practices, and continually adapting the curriculum based on new ideas and research.

Building a future of engaged citizens by investing in playful journalism education offers significant long-term benefits. By nurturing critical thinking, communication skills, and responsible information consumption from a young age, it can make a difference for a generation of informed and engaged citizens where children can learn to analyze information, tell stories, and participate in ethical news production will be better equipped to navigate the complex media landscape and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Foster a culture of active citizenship that shows playful journalism can spark curiosity about local and global issues, encouraging young people to investigate, advocate, and participate in shaping their world.

Supporting the DepEd's vision of holistic development: Integrating playful journalism aligns with DepEd's emphasis on learning through activity, creativity, and critical thinking, fostering well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century can help unlock the

potential of playful journalism to empower young minds, engage communities, and build a brighter future for generations to come.

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