

## Comparative analysis of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in the Ghanaian Language perspective

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### ABSTRACT

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This investigation examined the effectiveness and implications of two prominent pedagogical approaches, namely play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy, within the context of Ghanaian language education. The study aims to shed light on the advantages and challenges associated with these approaches and provide insights into their suitability for promoting effective language learning outcomes in Ghanaian classrooms. The approach adapted for the investigation was qualitative. Three hundred (300) participants were involved in this investigation. Purposive sampling was its technique. Observation, focus group discussion and interview were used as data collection instruments to elicit essential information to support the analysis. The investigation underscored the significance of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in enhancing language learning outcomes in Ghanaian classrooms. The study revealed the Ghana could adopt or cultivate innovative pedagogical strategies to enhance language learning environment that empowers students, promotes linguistic diversity, and nurtures a lifelong love for learning languages. Vygotsky Lev (1930) sociocultural theory influenced this investigation.

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## 1. Introduction

The education system plays a crucial role in shaping the future of any nation, and it is essential to continuously explore and evaluate different teaching methodologies to ensure effective learning outcomes. In Ghana, where language acquisition and cultural preservation are of paramount importance, examining the impact of pedagogical approaches on language learning becomes even more significant. This public interest statement aims to shed light on the comparative analysis of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in the Ghanaian language perspective. There are these schools of thought, while the first is advocating for the two pedagogies been the same, other hold's different view. It is therefore paramount to examining these approaches. The outcomes of this study will provide valuable recommendations for stakeholders in the education sector, ultimately working towards creating inclusive and impactful language learning environments for the future generations of Ghana.

Education is a critical aspect of a nation's development, and the pedagogical approaches employed in classrooms play a significant role in shaping students' learning experiences. There has been growing interest in alternative teaching methodologies that promote active learning, engagement, and critical thinking. Two such approaches gaining attention in the educational landscape are play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy. Establishing the importance of language education in Ghana, emphasizing the need for innovative and learner-centered strategies. The fundamental concepts of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy. The investigation will establish the key characteristics of the two approaches in terms of instructional methods, learner engagement, and cognitive development.

Drawing upon existing literature and empirical research, the analysis presents evidence of the benefits of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in facilitating language acquisition among Ghanaian learners. How play-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on interactive and experiential learning through play, can foster language development, socio-emotional skills, and cultural understanding. Similarly, inquiry-based pedagogy, which encourages active exploration, critical thinking, and problem-solving, can enhance language proficiency, information retention, and research skills. The challenges associated with implementing play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in the Ghanaian language context. These challenges encompass factors such as limited resources, cultural considerations, teacher training, and assessment methodologies. The investigation also looks at the potential strategies and recommendations to overcome these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of contextually relevant and culturally sensitive adaptations of these pedagogical approaches.

This comparative analysis underscores the significance of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in enhancing language learning outcomes in Ghanaian classrooms. It highlights the need for further research and collaboration among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop comprehensive frameworks that integrate these approaches into the Ghanaian language curriculum effectively. It focuses on exploring the effectiveness and implications of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy within the context of Ghanaian language education. Ghana is a multilingual country with over 80 indigenous languages, and the promotion of these languages in educational settings is crucial for preserving cultural identity and fostering inclusive education. Understanding the benefits and challenges of these pedagogical approaches can contribute to improving language education practices and student outcomes in Ghana.

Play-based pedagogy, also known as playful learning or active learning, emphasizes the use of structured play activities as a means of instruction. Play is a natural medium through which children explore, experiment, and make sense of their surroundings. In the Ghanaian language perspective, play-based pedagogy can involve interactive games, storytelling, songs, and role-playing to facilitate language acquisition and development. By integrating play into the classroom, teachers can create a joyful and engaging environment that enhances students' motivation, creativity, and social-emotional skills. Inquiry-based pedagogy revolves around the idea of student-driven learning and inquiry. It encourages students to ask questions, investigate topics of interest, and seek answers through research, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In the Ghanaian language context, inquiry-based pedagogy can involve exploring cultural traditions, conducting language-related investigations, and engaging in dialogue with peers and community members. This approach promotes active participation, independent thinking, and deeper understanding of language and culture.

## **2. Literature Review**

Vygotsky (1930) Sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in children's cognitive development. According to this theory, learning occurs through a process called "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support from more knowledgeable individuals. This theory suggests that play provides a platform for children to engage in social interactions and construct meaning through their interactions with peers and adults. Play-based pedagogy encourages children to explore, experiment, and make sense of their environment through imaginative play, role-playing, and hands-on activities. In the Ghanaian Language perspective, play-based pedagogy could involve incorporating traditional Ghanaian games, songs, and cultural activities to enhance language learning and cultural understanding. Inquiry-based pedagogy aligns with Vygotsky's theory by emphasizing active engagement and problem-solving. In inquiry-based pedagogy, students pose questions, investigate topics of interest, and seek answers through research and critical thinking. This approach encourages students to develop their own understanding and construct knowledge through active exploration and collaborative discussions. In the Ghanaian Language perspective, inquiry-based pedagogy could involve students investigating Ghanaian literature, folklore, or current societal issues using the target language, thus promoting deeper language learning and critical thinking skills.

Palmer (2006) explores the importance of play-based pedagogy in children's development. She argues that play is essential for children's physical, emotional, and cognitive growth, and that a decline in playtime and active outdoor play is detrimental to their overall well-being. Palmer emphasizes that play allows children to learn and explore the world around them at their own pace, fostering creativity, problem-solving skills, social interaction, and resilience. She raises concerns about the increasing academic pressures placed on children, which often result in a reduction in playtime and a focus on structured learning activities from an early age. According to Palmer the modern world presents numerous challenges to play and child development. Factors such as excessive screen time, a sedentary lifestyle, reduced access to outdoor spaces, and an overemphasis on academic achievement can hinder children's opportunities for free play and limit their physical and social development.

Gray (2011) argues that play is essential for children's healthy development. It allows them to explore, experiment, and learn important life skills such as problem-solving, social interaction, creativity, and emotional regulation. He highlights that over the past few decades, there has been a significant decline in children's opportunities for free, unstructured play. Factors contributing to this decline include increased academic pressure, structured activities, and limited access to safe outdoor spaces. Gray suggests that the decline in playtime is linked to an increase in psychopathological symptoms among children and adolescents. He cites research indicating a rise in anxiety, depression, suicide rates, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, which he attributes, at least in part, to play deprivation. He argues that the educational system's focus on standardized testing, rigid curricula, and reduced recess time has limited children's opportunities for self-directed, imaginative play. He suggests that incorporating play-based pedagogy into schools can improve academic outcomes and overall well-being. Gray emphasizes the numerous benefits of play, including enhanced cognitive skills, emotional resilience, social competence, and creativity. Play also provides a sense of joy, intrinsic motivation, and a foundation for lifelong learning.

David (2012) said play-based pedagogy aligns with the belief that children learn best through active exploration, hands-on experiences, and meaningful interactions. It promotes a positive and engaging learning environment that supports children's holistic development during the early years. Loris (1998) attested that play is a fundamental aspect of children's learning process. He believed that children have a hundred languages, or multiple ways of expressing themselves, and play allows them to explore and communicate their ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Play is seen as a tool for investigation, problem-solving, creativity, and social interaction. He said the curriculum in play-based pedagogy emerges from the children's interests and inquiries. Teachers act as facilitators, observing and documenting children's play, listening to their ideas, and designing activities that build upon their existing knowledge. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and motivation among children, as they feel empowered to direct their own learning. He admonishes that play-based pedagogy encourages collaborative learning and social interaction. Children often engage in group projects, working together to solve problems, negotiate ideas, and learn from one another. This cooperative approach helps children develop important social skills, such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Bruce (2014) said Play-based pedagogy refers to an approach to education that recognizes the importance of play in children's learning and development. It views play as a fundamental and natural way through which children explore, interact with their environment, and make sense of the world around them. Tina Bruce emphasizes the significance of play in the early years, particularly for babies, toddlers, and children in the foundation years. (Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, M. R., Laura E. B., & Singer G.D. 2008) define playful learning as "a joyful, actively engaging approach to education that takes advantage of children's natural curiosity and tendencies to explore, discover, and pretend." Playful learning involves creating a stimulating environment where children are encouraged to explore, interact, and make sense of the world around them through play. They argued that, play-based pedagogy supports language and literacy development. Play provides opportunities for children to engage in rich language experiences, storytelling, and vocabulary expansion. Pretend play, in particular, enhances narrative skills, understanding of different perspectives, and the ability to express thoughts and feelings. They emphasize that playful learning is not in conflict with academic readiness but rather supports it. Play-based activities lay the foundation for later academic learning by fostering curiosity, motivation, and a positive attitude towards learning. Playful experiences also help children develop foundational skills in numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving.

Dewey (1938) dewey argues against the traditional education model that prioritizes passive learning and rote memorization. Instead, he proposes an approach centered around active inquiry and problem-solving. According to Dewey, genuine learning occurs when students engage in purposeful activities that require them to think critically and reflect on their experiences. He emphasizes the importance of connecting education to real-life experiences. He argues that students learn best when they are actively involved in investigating and solving problems that are meaningful to them. By connecting education to the real world, students can develop a deeper understanding of concepts and their practical applications.

One key aspect of inquiry-based pedagogy, according to Dewey, is the notion of "learning by doing." He believes that students learn most effectively when they actively participate in hands-on activities and engage in direct experiences. Through these experiences, students can make connections between what they learn in the classroom and how it applies to their lives outside of school. He emphasizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a lecturer. The teacher's role is to guide and support students' inquiries, helping them develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of autonomy in their

learning. The teacher acts as a resource and mentor, providing guidance and feedback while allowing students to take ownership of their learning process.

Kieran (1997) posited that, Inquiry-based pedagogy promotes active learning, where students are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge rather than passively receiving information from the teacher. They take an active role in posing questions, formulating hypotheses, and conducting experiments or investigations. It puts students at the center of the learning process. It recognizes that students have unique prior knowledge, experiences, and interests, and allows them to explore and pursue their own lines of inquiry. This student-centered approach fosters autonomy, motivation, and a sense of ownership over learning. He said critical thinking and problem-solving is its hallmark, through inquiry-based learning, students develop critical thinking skills as they analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions. They learn to ask meaningful questions, think creatively, and solve problems independently or collaboratively. Jerome (1960) emphasizes the importance of active learning and argues that students should be active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. He advocates for an educational approach that encourages students to ask questions, explore, and discover knowledge for themselves. He argues that learning should be situated within meaningful and relevant contexts. By connecting new information to real-life situations or applications, students can develop a deeper understanding and see the relevance of what they are learning. Bruner recognizes the significance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. He encourages collaborative learning experiences where students can engage in dialogue, share ideas, and learn from one another.

Schwartz (1995) refers to the traditional approach to education that separates the acquisition of knowledge from its application. In this view, learning is compartmentalized, and students often struggle to transfer what they have learned in one context to another. Inquiry-based pedagogy challenges this assumption by emphasizing the interconnectedness of knowledge and encouraging students to transfer their learning across different domains. He said inquiry-based pedagogy promotes active learning by engaging students in meaningful tasks and problem-solving activities. Rather than simply memorizing information, students are encouraged to explore concepts, ask questions, and conduct investigations to develop a deeper understanding. This active engagement enhances their critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. John-Steiner & Soubberman (2018) highlighted the importance of personalization in education, which involves tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs, interests, and abilities of each student. It argues that inquiry-based pedagogy can facilitate personalized learning experiences by allowing students to explore topics that are meaningful to them. It was also emphasizing the significance of maintaining high expectations for students within the context of personalized education. They argue that inquiry-based pedagogy not only fosters intellectual growth but also cultivates a sense of agency and responsibility in students, leading to higher achievement.

### **3. Methodology**

There has been growing interest in alternative teaching methodologies that promote active learning, engagement, and critical thinking. Two such approaches gaining attention in the educational landscape are play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy. Establishing the importance of language education in Ghana, emphasizing the need for innovative and learner-centered strategies. The study confined itself with primary source of data. Other authorities work in relation to play – base pedagogy and

inquiry – based pedagogy was consulted and reviewed to match up with the current study. Comparative analysis design was adapted for the investigation. Purposive sampling technique was used to elicit significant information for the analysis. Data was collected through interviews, observations and focus group discussion. Three hundred (300) participants were involved in the investigation. The data was collected in the Kumasi Metropolis and its environs in the Asante Region of Ghana. Majority of the population in the Metropolis were trades, other sectors for instance politicians’ health and education are citizens. Their cultural activities been the fabric of their life is very essential to as Kumasi is the regional capital for the region. The sites were suitable for the investigation because the senior high schools’ teachers have a challenge of which pedagogy is the best among the play – based and inquiry – based. Close attention was paid to all participants to be in line with ethical issues which sometimes undermined their confidentiality. The target population for the investigation were teachers, students, educational institutions. Some of the institutions visited were Opoku Ware Senior High, St. Louis Senior High, Kumasi Anglican Senior High and Sakafia Islamic Senior High. In each case fifty (50) teachers were estimated for the interview.

Table 1. Sample Size

Gender	Number
Male	200
Female	100
Total	300

Table 2. Distribution of sample by participants and age bracket

Social status	Number of respondents	Age bracket
Educational Institution	50 (48)	36- 50yrs
Teachers	200 (196)	30- 56yrs
Students	50 (44)	17-21yrs
Total	300 (288)	-

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The investigation has identified the following findings Play-based pedagogy is an educational approach that emphasizes learning through play. It recognizes that children naturally engage in play as a means of exploring their environment, developing social skills, and acquiring knowledge. In a play-based learning environment, children are encouraged to actively participate in hands-on activities, use their imagination, and engage in collaborative play with their peers. Play-based pedagogy promotes holistic development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects of a child's growth. Inquiry-based pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on questioning, investigating, and exploring concepts and ideas. It encourages students to actively inquire, seek answers, and construct their own understanding of the world. In an inquiry-based learning environment, students are encouraged to ask questions, gather information, analyze data, and draw conclusions. This approach fosters critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Both play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy have shown positive outcomes in various educational settings worldwide. They can enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes by providing meaningful and interactive learning experiences. In the Ghanaian language perspective, incorporating play-based pedagogy may involve creating language-rich play environments

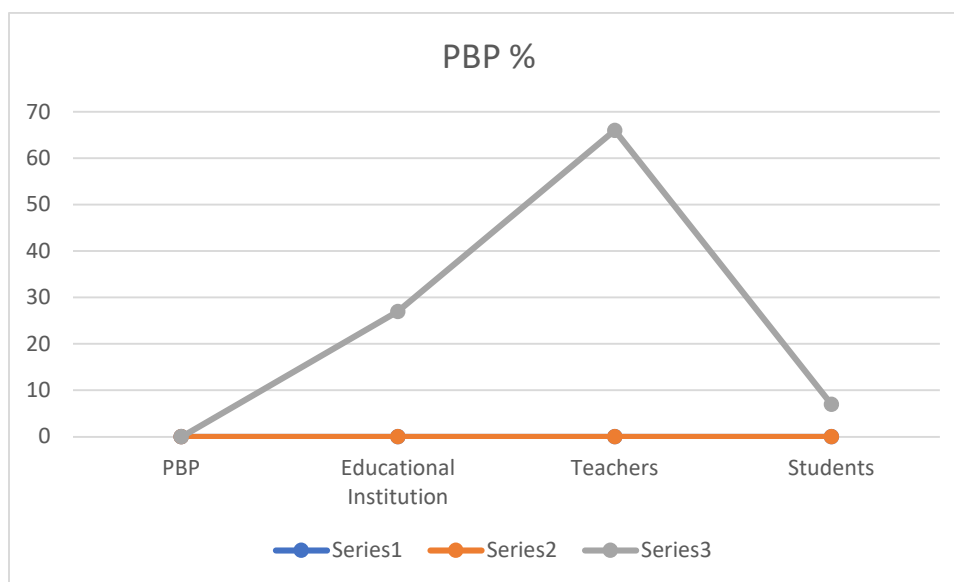
where children engage in language-related activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and language games. This approach can support the development of language skills, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural understanding.

The comparative analysis of play-based pedagogy and inquiry-based pedagogy in the Ghanaian language perspective highlights the potential benefits and challenges of these pedagogical approaches. Both methods offer unique opportunities to enhance language acquisition, cultural preservation, and critical thinking skills. Educators and policymakers in Ghana can draw upon the strengths of each approach. Language is not merely a tool for communication but also a gateway to cultural heritage, identity, and social cohesion. In Ghana, where numerous local languages thrive alongside English, it is vital to foster language skills to preserve cultural diversity and strengthen national unity. A solid foundation in the Ghanaian language perspective allows students to connect with their heritage, express themselves effectively, and participate fully in society. Hence, exploring effective pedagogical approaches to language education is crucial to empower Ghanaian students and ensure the preservation of linguistic traditions. Both pedagogical approaches can support language acquisition by providing immersive and contextualized language experiences. Play-based activities create opportunities for language use in a meaningful and enjoyable context, while inquiry-based approaches foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enabling students to apply language skills in real-life situations.

Table 3: Awareness of play – based pedagogy.

Are you aware of play - based pedagogy? (Yes/No)	Number of Respondents	Response / Percentage
Educational Institution	50 (45)	(Yes) 27%
Teachers	200 (109)	(Yes) 66%
Student	50 (11)	(Yes) 7%
Total	300 (165)	100%

Per the table above forty – five (45) respondents representing 27% out of 48 educational Institution officers were aware of play – based pedagogy. One hundred and nine (109) respondents representing 66% out of 196 teachers in senior high school responded (Yes) to the question whereas eleven (11) respondents representing 7% out of 44 students answered (Yes) It is therefore debatable whether teachers used play – based pedagogy in their delivery. In cultural sense, play-based pedagogy can incorporate culturally significant elements such as traditional games, songs, and stories, which enhance cultural preservation and reinforce students' cultural identity. Inquiry-based pedagogy, on the other hand, encourages students to explore their own cultural heritage and understand the linguistic and cultural diversity of Ghana. Play-based pedagogy requires teachers to act as facilitators, guiding and supporting students during play activities. They create a conducive environment that encourages language use and provides scaffolding when necessary.

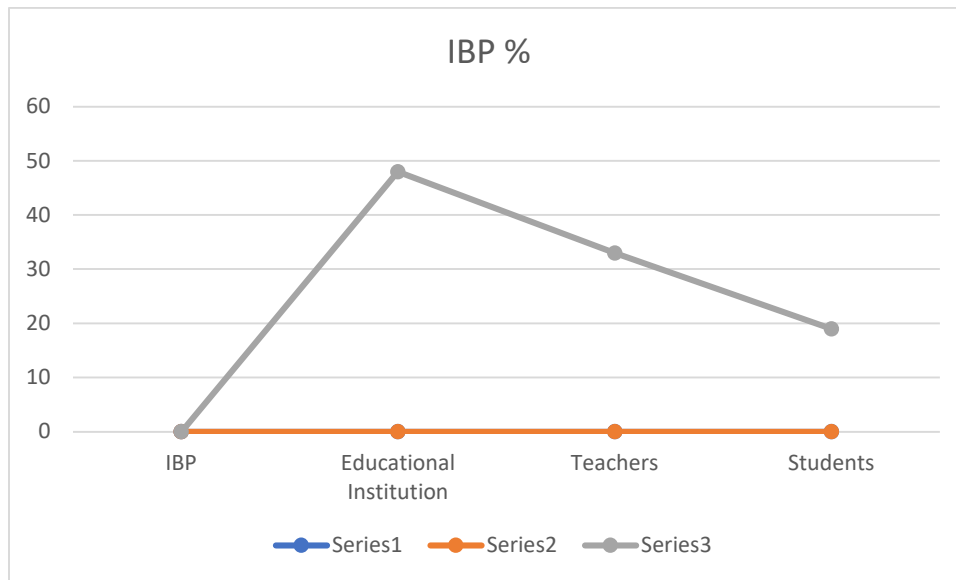


Play-based pedagogy is an approach that recognizes the innate curiosity, creativity, and active engagement of children. Through structured play, children can develop essential cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. Play-based pedagogy creates a nurturing environment where students actively explore the Ghanaian language, engage in interactive language activities, and develop a deep understanding of linguistic concepts. It encourages students to use the language in real-life contexts, fostering communication skills and cultural understanding. Incorporating play-based pedagogy in language education, can create a joyful, inclusive, and effective learning experience for Ghanaian students.

Table 4: Awareness of inquiry - based pedagogy.

Are you aware of inquiry - based pedagogy? (Yes/No)	Number of Respondents	Response / Percentage
Educational Institution	50 (46)	(Yes) 48%
Teachers	32 (109)	(Yes) 33%
Students	18 (50)	(Yes) 19%
Total	96	100%

The table four above depicts of the awareness of inquiry – based pedagogy. forty – six (46) out of 48 educational institution officers responded (Yes) representing 48% while thirty – two (32) out of 109 teachers in senior high schools responded (Yes) representing 33% and (18) out of 50 students representing 19% responded Yes. There was appreciable evident that teachers in senior high school do not used the inquiry – based pedagogy. Inquiry-based pedagogy requires teachers to be facilitators of learning, helping students formulate questions, design investigations, and critically analyze information. On students' assessment play-based pedagogy can be challenging, as traditional assessment methods may not capture the full extent of learning that occurs during play. Inquiry-based pedagogy allows for varied forms of assessment, including projects, presentations, and portfolios, which can provide a comprehensive view of students' language proficiency and inquiry skills.



Inquiry-based pedagogy emphasizes student-led exploration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This approach encourages students to ask questions, investigate, and construct knowledge through active participation. In the Ghanaian language perspective, inquiry-based pedagogy enables students to explore the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of their communities. Engaging in authentic language tasks, such as researching, interviewing native speakers, or analyzing cultural artifacts, students deepen their understanding of the language and its cultural context. Inquiry-based pedagogy promotes independent learning, enhances critical thinking skills, and nurtures a sense of ownership and pride in the Ghanaian language.

Play-based pedagogy emphasizes learning through play and hands-on activities. It recognizes the natural inclination of children to play and explores how play can be incorporated into educational settings to enhance learning outcomes. By engaging in play, children can develop social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills. In a Ghanaian language context, play-based pedagogy may involve using local games, songs, and storytelling to facilitate language acquisition and cultural understanding. Inquiry-based pedagogy focuses on promoting active learning and critical thinking by encouraging students to explore questions, investigate topics, and construct their own knowledge. It fosters curiosity, problem-solving skills, and deeper understanding. In the context of Ghanaian language education, inquiry-based pedagogy may involve guiding students to explore linguistic structures, cultural practices, or historical aspects of the Ghanaian language through research, interviews, or experiential learning activities.

Play-based pedagogy emphasizes the importance of learning through play, recognizing that children learn best when they are actively engaged in meaningful and enjoyable activities. It allows children to explore, experiment, and make sense of their environment, fostering creativity, imagination, and social interaction. In the Ghanaian language context, play-based pedagogy can be particularly effective in developing language skills, as children engage in language-rich play scenarios that encourage communication, vocabulary development, and cultural understanding. However, one limitation of play-based pedagogy is the potential challenge in striking a balance between free play and achieving specific learning outcomes, as educators need to ensure that play activities align with educational goals. On the other hand, inquiry-based pedagogy promotes learning through

questioning, investigation, and problem-solving. It encourages students to actively seek knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and construct their own understanding of the subject matter. In the Ghanaian language perspective, inquiry-based pedagogy can enhance language learning by encouraging students to explore the language, its structure, and its cultural context through meaningful inquiries. However, implementing inquiry-based pedagogy may require a well-designed curriculum, adequate resources, and skilled teachers who can facilitate the inquiry process effectively. Additionally, the assessment of learning outcomes in inquiry-based pedagogy can be challenging due to its emphasis on individual exploration and varied student responses. Combining play-based and inquiry-based approaches can be beneficial for children's learning outcomes. Integrating play and inquiry allows for a holistic learning experience that incorporates both the cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of development. In the Ghanaian language perspective, such an integrated approach could involve using play as a means to initiate inquiries and investigations, allowing students to explore language concepts and cultural dimensions through hands-on activities, questioning, and problem-solving.

## 5. Conclusion

Play-based and inquiry-based pedagogies have their merits in the Ghanaian language context. Play-based pedagogy supports language development through interactive and creative play experiences, while inquiry-based pedagogy fosters critical thinking and deep understanding of the language. To optimize language learning outcomes, a balanced approach that combines elements of both pedagogies can be considered. Integrating playful elements into inquiry-based activities and incorporating inquiry-based approaches into play-based experiences can create a comprehensive learning environment that engages students, nurtures their language skills, and encourages their curiosity and active participation in the Ghanaian language learning process.

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