

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF APPLYING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY IN TEACHING READING IN VIETNAMESE GRADE 2

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the application of learning through play in teaching Reading for Grade 2, in response to the requirements of innovating teaching methods under the 2018 General Education Curriculum. The study employed theoretical research methods and conducted surveys with 40 teachers and 170 students at primary schools in Cam Pha City, Quang Ninh Province, to explore the current status of applying this method. The results show that most teachers are aware of the importance of learning through play but have not applied it regularly and still face limitations in the types and techniques of organization. Students are enthusiastic when participating in games, showing great potential for improving learning outcomes. The study proposes enhancing teachers' professional capacity, designing games appropriate to lesson content, and improving teaching conditions to effectively promote learning through play in Grade 2 Reading lessons.

Keywords: Application, Learning Through Play, Reading, Vietnamese, Grade 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of a fundamental and comprehensive reform of education, teaching methods play a crucial role in developing learners' competencies and qualities. The 2018 General Education Curriculum shifts the focus from knowledge transmission to competency development; particularly emphasizing activities appropriate to students' psychological characteristics [2]. At the primary level, creating a learning environment that fosters experience, exploration, and enjoyment is essential to improving teaching and learning quality.

Vietnamese is a foundational subject that contributes to the development of students' language abilities, thinking skills, and emotional growth [2]. In particular, the Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline helps students read accurately, comprehend texts, and nurture a love for their mother tongue. However, many reading lessons are still heavily teacher-centered, focusing mainly on technical aspects, lacking interactive activities, and causing students to be passive and less engaged. This situation underscores the urgent need to innovate teaching methods to enhance students' activeness and autonomy in learning.

Learning through play is a modern and effective teaching approach that has been proven worldwide [8], [11]. Games help students absorb knowledge naturally while developing language, thinking, and social skills. Applying this approach to Grade 2 Reading lessons aligns well with students' psychological characteristics, meets the requirements of educational innovation, and

enhances the effectiveness and quality of learning. This article, based on theoretical foundations, investigates the current application of learning through play in Grade 2 Reading lessons at several primary schools in Quang Ninh Province. The findings aim to identify strengths and limitations in implementation and propose solutions to improve students' reading performance in particular and Vietnamese language learning in general.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning through play has a long history of development in the field of education. As early as the 19th century, Friedrich Froebel, known as the “father of the kindergarten model”, asserted that play is the most natural form of learning for children. According to him, play is not a supplementary activity but the central learning activity of young children [16].

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, emphasized that during play, children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their surroundings. He argued that play helps children reinforce acquired knowledge and develop logical thinking and language skills [6].

Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, approached play from a sociocultural perspective. He proposed that through play, children operate within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), thereby developing higher levels of social, language, and cognitive abilities [6].

In many developed countries, learning through play is considered a core pedagogical method in primary education. Educational programs such as Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and HighScope place play at the center of their learning models to foster students' language, critical thinking, and creativity. Experimental studies conducted in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Finland have demonstrated that students who learn through play show stronger reading comprehension and language expression skills, as well as more positive attitudes toward learning [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], ...

In Vietnam, educators have long recognized the importance of play in primary school teaching. Since the 1990s, instructional materials issued by the Ministry of Education and Training have encouraged teachers to incorporate learning games to enhance engagement and reduce academic pressure on students [4], [6], [7], [8], [9], [11], [14], ...

Several studies have shown the positive effects of learning games on language development, including vocabulary expansion, improved reading comprehension, faster linguistic reflexes, and greater confidence in communication [1], [5], [11], [13], [15]. However, most of these studies only highlight the general effectiveness of play in Vietnamese language teaching and have not focused specifically on Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline.

Although there has been considerable research, the application of learning through play in reading instruction still lacks a systematic methodology. Teachers often use games sporadically and unsystematically, without closely linking them to lesson objectives. Moreover, the evaluation of game effectiveness remains unsystematic and lacks scientific rigor. Therefore, there is a need for in-depth studies to develop specific measures, structured procedures, and practical implementation strategies for Grade 2 Reading lessons.

3. METHODS

This study employs theoretical research methods to review relevant theoretical documents and educational curricula in order to build a solid theoretical foundation for proposing measures to apply learning through play. At the same time, the study uses survey methods—including questionnaires and observations—conducted with 40 teachers and 170 students at several primary schools in Cam Pha City, Quang Ninh Province.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview of the Survey Process

- Survey objectives: The survey aimed to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of applying learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline in Vietnamese at several primary schools in Cam Pha City, Quang Ninh Province. The surveyed schools included Suoi Khoang Primary School, Quang Hanh Primary School, Cam Thach Primary School, and Cam Thuy Primary School.

- Survey content: The current awareness of teachers regarding the application of learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline; the current situation of applying sub-discipline in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline; the challenges teachers face when applying learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline.

- Survey participants: The survey was conducted using questionnaires for both teachers and students. A total of 170 students and 40 teachers participated, all from several primary schools in Cam Pha City, Quang Ninh Province. All participating teachers had more than five years of teaching experience, with many having over eight years, thus possessing considerable professional expertise. These teachers are experienced in primary education and demonstrate strong professional commitment.

- Survey methods: Educational survey methods: Interviews with primary school teachers and students were conducted on issues related to the application of sub-discipline in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline. Questionnaires were administered to both teachers and students to collect data on current teaching practices.

Observation method: This method was used throughout the study—from the initial survey to the experimental phase. We observed classroom activities to document how teachers organized lessons and how students engaged with learning through play. Observations were conducted during regular class sessions in the first semester of the 2024–2025 school year at several primary schools in Cam Pha City, Quang Ninh Province.

The collected data were processed and analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

4.2. Survey Results on the Current Situation

4.2.1. Survey Results for Teachers

Teachers' awareness of applying learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline in Vietnamese

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Necessity of Applying Learning Through Play in Teaching Grade 2 Reading Sub-discipline

No.	Criterion	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Very necessary	12	30.0
2	Necessary	25	62.5
3	Moderately necessary	3	7.5
4	Not necessary	0	0.0

The survey results show that the majority of teachers place a high value on the necessity of applying learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline in Vietnamese. Specifically, 62.5% of teachers consider this method necessary, and 30.0% consider it very necessary. Only 7.5% of teachers view it as moderately necessary, and none consider it unnecessary. This indicates that teachers have a positive perception of the role of learning through play in reading instruction.

+ Teachers' application of learning through play in Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline.

Table 2. Level of teachers' application of learning through play in teaching Grade 2 Reading

No.	Criterion	Number of teachers	Percentage %
1	Frequently	8	20.0
2	Occasionally	22	55.0
3	Rarely	6	15.0
4	Never	4	10.0

The survey results show that the frequency of applying learning through play remains at a moderate level. Specifically, 55.0% of teachers reported using this method occasionally, while only 20.0% reported applying it frequently. A smaller number of teachers indicated limited use: 15.0% said they rarely use it, and 10.0% stated they never use it. Overall, the application of learning through play in Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline is not yet widespread or regular.

Table 3. Activities Frequently Used by Teachers to Organize Learning Through Play in Grade 2 Reading Sub-discipline

No	Activity	Level							
		Frequently		Occasionally		Rarely		Never used	
		Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Accurate reading	9	22.5	16	40.0	10	25	5	12.5
2	Fluent reading	12	30.0	13	32.5	11	27.0	4	10.0
3	Expressive reading	13	32.5	18	45.0	7	17.5	2	5.0
4	Silent/skim reading	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
5	Reading comprehension	15	37.5	19	47.5	6	15.0	0	0.0

The results show that the activities teachers use in learning through play vary in frequency. Activities such as “accurate reading,” “fluent reading,” and “expressive reading” are implemented at a relatively high average level. For instance, 32.5% of teachers frequently organize expressive reading activities, and 30.0% frequently organize fluent reading activities.

However, silent or skim reading activities are not used at all. Meanwhile, reading comprehension activities receive more attention, with 37.5% of teachers frequently applying them and 47.5% occasionally applying them. This reflects a clear emphasis on strengthening reading comprehension skills but also indicates a lack of diversity in reading activity types during learning through play implementation.

Table 4. Types of Learning Through Play Activities Frequently Used by Teachers in Grade 2 Reading Sub-discipline

No	Type of learning through play activity	Level							
		Frequently		Occasionally		Rarely		Never used	
		Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Free play	6	15.0	8	20.0	14	35.0	12	30.0
2	Guided play	8	20.0	22	55.0	6	15.0	4	10.0
3	Learning through games	12	30.0	18	45.0	7	17.5	3	7.5

4	Learning through structured guidance	15	37.5	19	47.5	6	15.0	0	0.0
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The data indicate that teachers most frequently use learning through structured guidance, with 37.5% applying it frequently and 47.5% occasionally. The proportion of teachers who do not use this type of activity is 0%. Learning through games is also applied quite commonly, with 30.0% of teachers using it frequently and 45.0% occasionally. Meanwhile, guided play has a lower frequency of use, with only 20.0% of teachers applying it frequently. Free play is the least used type of activity, with 30.0% of teachers reporting that they never use it. Overall, teachers tend to prefer structured and clearly guided learning activities rather than free play activities, which require more flexibility and less teacher control.

Table 5. Teaching methods frequently used by teachers to organize learning through play in Grade 2 reading sub-discipline

N o.	Teaching method	Level							
		Frequently		Occasionally		Rarely		Not used	
		Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Role play	9	22.5	18	45.0	8	20.0	5	12.5
2	Organizing games or competitions	13	32.5	17	42.5	7	17.5	3	7.5
3	Retelling stories	15	47.5	12	30.0	9	22.5	4	10.0
4	Discussion and debate	8	20.0	15	37.5	10	25.0	7	17.5
5	Reciting or reading poems expressively	16	40.0	18	45.0	6	15.0	0	0.0
6	Rewriting stories or writing a short summary of a story or informational text	6	15.0	10	25.0	14	35.0	10	25.0

The results show that the most commonly used method is “reciting or reading poems expressively”, with 40.0% of teachers applying it frequently and 45.0% occasionally. “Organizing games or competitions” is also widely applied, with 32.5% of teachers using it frequently.

However, more creative methods such as “rewriting or summarizing stories” and “discussion and debate” have lower frequencies of use, with less than 20.0% of teachers applying them frequently. This indicates that teachers tend to prioritize more traditional teaching methods over more innovative and student-centered approaches.

Table 6. Teaching Techniques Frequently Used by Teachers to Organize Learning Through Play in Grade 2 Reading Discipline in Vietnamese

No	Teaching technique	Level							
		Frequently		Occasionally		Rarely		Not used	
		Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
1	Jigsaw technique	6	15.0	17	42.5	9	22.5	8	20.0
2	KWL technique	5	12.5	15	37.5	11	27.5	9	22.5
3	Expert group technique	5	12.5	16	40.0	9	22.5	10	25.0
4	Curiosity stimulation technique	9	22.5	11	27.5	8	20.0	12	30.0
5	Debate technique	7	17.5	7	17.5	12	30.0	14	35.0
6	Carousel discussion	7	17.5	15	37.5	8	20.0	10	25.0

The results show that among the teaching techniques, “curiosity stimulation” and “carousel discussion (ball bearing)” are relatively common, with 22.5% and 17.5% of teachers using them frequently, respectively. However, techniques such as “Jigsaw” and “Expert group” are used less frequently, with only 12.5% of teachers applying them regularly. “Debate technique” is the least used, with 35.0% of teachers reporting that they never use it.

The current situation of teachers’ difficulties in applying learning through play in Grade 2 Reading lessons in the Vietnamese language subject.

Table 7. The current situation of teachers’ difficulties in applying learning through play in Grade 2 Reading sub-discipline in the Vietnamese

No.	Difficulty	Number of teachers	Percentage %
1	Lack of time to prepare and organize activities	27	67.5
2	Students are unfamiliar with learning and remain passive	10	25.0
3	Lack of sufficient materials and clear guidance	21	52.5
4	Limited teaching facilities and equipment	20	50.0
5	Thiếu sự hỗ trợ từ nhà trường và đồng nghiệp	8	20.0
6	Difficulty integrating play activities with reading lesson objectives	16	40.0
7	Students’ reading skills are not at the same level	23	57.5

8	Other (specify):....	0	0.0
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The data show that teachers face multiple difficulties when applying learning through play in Grade 2 Reading sub-d in the Vietnamese. The greatest challenge is a lack of time to prepare and organize activities, reported by 67.5% of teachers, followed by insufficient materials and clear guidance (52.5%). In addition, 57.5% of teachers find it difficult to address students' uneven reading skills, and 50.0% consider limited teaching facilities and equipment a barrier. Other challenges include students being unfamiliar with play-based learning (25.0%) and difficulties in integrating play activities with lesson objectives (40.0%).

Overall, the main challenges relate to a lack of time, supporting materials, and inadequate facilities. This indicates that applying learning through play requires significant investment of time and resources, as well as careful preparation from teachers and strong support from schools.

4.2.2. Survey Results for Students

Appendix 2 was used to survey the current situation of Grade 2 students' reading learning, and the results are as follows

Table 8. Students' level of interest in vietnamese reading lessons

No.	Criterion	Number of students	Percentage %
1	Very interested	56	32.9
2	Interested	71	41.8
3	Neutral	28	16.5
4	Not interested	15	8.8

The survey results show that the majority of students feel interested in reading lessons. Specifically, 32.9% of students reported being very interested, and 41.8% reported being interested, accounting for a total of 74.7%. Meanwhile, 16.5% of students expressed a neutral attitude, and only 8.8% reported being not interested in reading lessons.

These findings indicate that reading lessons in Vietnamese have successfully captured the interest of most students, creating a favorable foundation for the effective application of learning through play in the classroom

Table 9. Students' level of interest when participating in games during reading lessons

No.	Criterion	Number of students	Percentage %
1	Very interested	60	35.3
2	Interested	69	40.6
3	Neutral	32	18.8

4	Not interested	9	5.3
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The survey results show that students have a high level of interest when participating in games during reading lessons. Specifically, 35.3% of students reported being very interested, and 40.6% were interested, accounting for a total of 75.9%. Meanwhile, 18.8% expressed a neutral attitude, and only 5.3% were not interested.

These findings indicate that the games integrated into reading lessons help capture students' attention and increase their motivation, contributing to a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Table 10. Students' level of comprehension when participating in games during reading lessons

No.	Criterion	Number of students	Percentage %
1	Clearly understand the lesson content and retain it longer	55	32.4
2	Clearly understand the lesson content but sometimes forget	75	44.1
3	Understand part of the lesson content but have difficulty remembering it	29	17.1
4	Do not help me understand the lesson content	11	6.5

The survey on students' level of comprehension when participating in games shows that 32.4% of students "clearly understand the lesson content and retain it longer", while 44.1% "clearly understand the lesson content but sometimes forget". Some students only "understand part of the lesson content but have difficulty remembering" (17.1%), and 6.5% believe that games "do not help them understand the lesson content".

Overall, the games have a positive impact on students' learning and comprehension, but the long-term retention effect still needs to be improved.

Table 11. Students' level of participation in activities or games related to reading lessons in Vietnamese

No.	Criterion	Number of students	Percentage %
1	Frequently	51	30
2	Occasionally	68	40
3	Rarely	33	19.4
4	Never	18	10.6

The data show that only 30.0% of students participate in activities or games related to reading lessons frequently, while the majority (40.0%) participate occasionally. A smaller proportion of students participate rarely (19.4%) and 10.6% reported that they never participate.

These findings indicate that the organization of reading-related games and activities has not been implemented regularly and should be strengthened to ensure more consistent student engagement.

Table 12. Students' difficulties when participating in games during reading lessons

No.	Criterion	Number of students	Percentage %
1	The rules of the game are difficult to understand	59	34.7
2	Classmates do not cooperate well	61	35.9
3	The playing time is too short	67	39.4
4	The game is not related to the lesson content	40	23.5
5	I feel unconfident when playing in front of others	57	33.5
6	The game is too difficult and I cannot complete it	64	37.6
7	The game is too easy, so I find it uninteresting	62	36.5

The survey results show that students face a number of difficulties when participating in games during reading lessons. The most common difficulties are “the playing time is too short” (39.4%), “the game is too difficult” (37.6%), and “classmates do not cooperate well” (35.9%).

Some students also reported issues such as “the rules of the game are difficult to understand” (34.7%), “feeling unconfident when participating” (33.5%), and “the game is too easy, so it is not interesting” (36.5%). In addition, 23.5% of students commented that “the game is not related to the lesson content”.

These findings suggest that there is a need to improve the design and organization of game-based activities to make them more appropriate, engaging, and effective in supporting students' learning.

2.3. General Assessment of the Current Situation

2.3.1. Achievements

a) From the teachers' perspective

The survey results show that teachers recognize learning through play (LTP) as an important tool in teaching reading in Vietnamese for Grade 2 students. Many teachers have a positive perception of this method's potential to help students develop reading skills. Activities such as expressive reading and reading comprehension, along with different forms of play-based learning, reflect teachers' efforts to innovate teaching methods.

b) From the students' perspective

Students show a positive attitude toward reading lessons and related games. Most students feel interested and believe that games help them understand lessons better and remember content more effectively. Learning through play has increased their engagement and supported the development of reading skills, enabling students to approach lesson content in a more lively and active way.

2.3.2. Limitations and Causes

a) From the teachers' perspective

The frequency of applying learning through play in reading lessons remains limited, and the forms of implementation are not yet diverse. The main reasons include a lack of preparation time, insufficient supporting materials, inadequate facilities, and uneven reading skills among students.

Additionally, integrating game content with lesson objectives is still challenging, especially when students are unfamiliar with the method. Many teachers also face difficulties in applying modern teaching methods and techniques, leading to activities that are often monotonous, less engaging, and not fully effective in supporting students' reading development.

Furthermore, play-based learning activities such as free play or structured play have not been applied sufficiently or in ways that match students' abilities. A lack of clear alignment between game content and lesson objectives reduces the overall effectiveness of the method. These limitations mainly stem from curriculum pressure, limited class time, and a lack of teaching materials or equipment.

b) From the students' perspective

Students face several difficulties when participating in game activities during reading lessons. Common issues include games that are not well aligned with lesson content, unclear rules, and insufficient playing time. Some students feel unconfident or struggle to participate due to game designs that do not fully meet their learning needs.

Moreover, teachers' limited experience in organizing and guiding games contributes to these challenges, along with external factors such as time constraints and inadequate materials or equipment.

These findings highlight the need to improve the design and organization of game-based activities and provide better learning conditions to maximize the effectiveness of learning through play in reading lessons.

5. CONCLUSION

Learning through play is identified as a modern educational method that utilizes purposeful play activities to foster the comprehensive development of students' competencies and qualities.

The survey results reveal that both teachers and students clearly recognize the important role of learning through play in teaching and learning reading. However, the frequency and effectiveness of learning through play application remain limited due to several factors, such as insufficient time for implementation, unclear game rules, and games that are not well aligned with lesson content or students' abilities.

These issues indicate that to optimize the effectiveness of learning through play in reading instruction, it is necessary to improve game design, increase the availability of teaching resources, and enhance teachers' organizational capacity.

For primary school students, especially Grade 2 learners, learning through play not only stimulates interest but also plays an active role in developing reading skills, which is one of the four core language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) defined in the 2018 General Education Program.

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