

## Play-Based Early Education and Teachers' Professional Development: Impact on Vulnerable Children

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**Abstract :** This paper explores the intricate dynamics of play-based early childhood education (ECE) and the impact of professional development on teachers implementing play-based pedagogy, particularly in the context of vulnerable Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. By utilizing qualitative methodologies, including classroom observations and in-depth interviews with five early childhood educators and a field manager, this study delves into the challenges and transformations experienced by teachers in adopting play-based learning strategies. The research unveils the critical role of continuous and context-specific professional development in empowering teachers to implement play-based pedagogies effectively. When appropriately supported, it emphasizes how such educational approaches significantly enhance children's cognitive, social, and emotional development in crisis-affected environments. Key findings indicate that despite diverse educational backgrounds, teachers show considerable growth in their pedagogical skills through targeted professional development. This growth is vital for fostering a learning environment where vulnerable children can thrive, particularly in humanitarian settings. The paper also addresses educators' challenges, including adapting to play-based methodologies, resource limitations, and balancing curricular requirements with the need for holistic child development. This study contributes to the discourse on early childhood education in crisis contexts, emphasizing the need for sustainable, well-structured professional development programs. It underscores the potential of play-based learning to bridge educational gaps and contribute to the healing process of children facing calamity. The study highlights significant implications for policymakers, educators, schools, and not-for-profit organizations engaged in early childhood education in humanitarian contexts, stressing the importance of investing in teacher capacity and curriculum reform to enhance the quality of education for children in general and vulnerable ones in particular.

**Keywords :** play-based learning, professional development, vulnerable children, early childhood education

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