

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AT EARLY CHILDHOOD
CENTRES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE EFFUTU
MUNICIPALITY**



MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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CENTRES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE EFFUTU
MUNICIPALITY**



**A thesis in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
Faculty of Educational Studies, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Early Childhood Education)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

APRIL, 2023

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, TRACY OWUSU, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature.....

Date.....

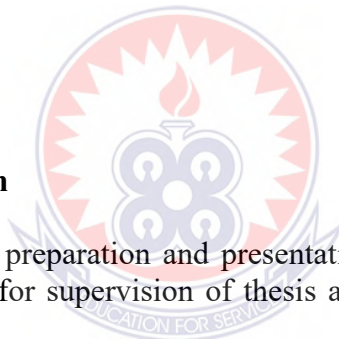
Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised following the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Paul Kobbin's Effirim (Ph.D)

Signature.....

Date.....



DEDICATION

To my wonderful mother Constance Owusu, and my uncle Professor Andy Ofori Birikorang (Ph.D). God's blessings on you



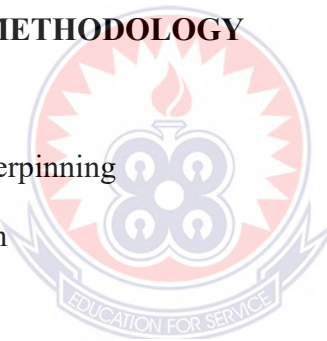
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers at early childhood centres in Effutu Municipality during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is underpinned by the social constructivism paradigm. This Study adopted a qualitative research design and a phenomenological research design was employed for the study. A purposive sampling technique of homogenous type was used to select 15 respondents for the study. A semi-structured interview guide was used as data collection instrument. Trustworthiness of the data was ensured using credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability criteria. Data collected were thematically analyzed. The findings among others revealed: Protecting self and others, Income discrepancies, Cleaning and disinfecting the learning environment and delivery methods. Based on the key findings, It was recommended among others that the Ministry of Education makes ICT resources and facilities available to both teachers and learners, ensures sufficient training for teachers and learners, and digitalized curricular materials for effective implementation of virtual learning in such pandemics.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, limitations of the study, operational definitions of terms and organisation of the study.

1.1 Background to the Study

COVID-19 has influenced people's lives all around the world. The pandemic has impacted every aspect of human existence, including religious activities, funerals, business, education, public healthcare systems, and social events (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020). COVID-19 refers to the acronym Co-corona, Vi-virus, D-disease, and 19 represents 2019 the year the novel virus was detected (UNESCO, 2020). On December 31, 2019, the world health organization received formal notification of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, home to 11 million people and central China's cultural and economic centre. According to Ghana health Service (2020) virus spreads through coming into contact with contaminated surfaces or with an infected person, thus through the droplets of saliva or mucus that comes when the person coughs or sneezes into the air or the hand. Also, one can be infected with the disease by touching a contaminated surface and touching his or her face (e.g., nose, eyes, and mouth).

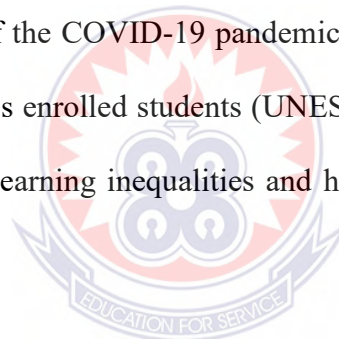
The COVID-19 virus is reported to be a dangerous disease with an incubation period of 7-14 days and can be fatal for people who have a weaker immune system and elderly people (Ghana Health Service, GHS, 2020). The virus can stay on surfaces

example, tables, doorknobs, handles, hands, phones, etc. and when an unaffected person comes into contact with any of these surfaces and touches the eye, mouth, and nose, the person is likely to contract the virus easily because the virus can stay and survive on these surfaces for several hours (WHO & GHS, 2020). It was quickly determined that the virus is widely spreadable. By January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) had designated the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of worldwide significance only two months later, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. According to Chomilo, Clinton, Guzman-Cottril and Lewis (2021), COVID-19 has killed 63,000 Americans and among those who survived millions fell into poverty and some came closely losing their homes and struggled to feed their families. Chomilo et al (2021) further contended that over 55 million American children were out of school during the pandemic due to COVID-19-related school closures, which compelled schools to shift instruction online to keep kid's teachers, and staff safe. According to UNESCO (2020), a total of 9,696,756 children and youth in Ghana were out of school as a result of the pandemic, including 1,852,028 in pre-primary, 4,54875 in primary, 2,851,160 in junior and senior high school, and 43,693 in various institutions. Chen et al (2021) noted that many youngsters dropped out of school during the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, for example, due to school closures, which would have helped to contain the spread of the disease.

On the 12th of March, 2020 Ghana received its two confirmed cases of the COVID-19 involving people who have returned from Turkey and Norway(Nantwi & Boateng 2020). As of the 15th of May, 2020, there were 5,530 confirmed cases, 4,832 active cases, 674 recoveries, and 24 deaths. Cases of the illness have been reported in thirteen of the sixteen regions in Ghana (GHS, 2020). By December 2020, 54,000

Ghanaians had tested positive for COVID-19, with 323 deaths. At the end of December, Ghana was the fifth country in Sub-Saharan Africa with the most confirmed cases, trailed by South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria (UNICEF-Ghana, 2021). Jindong (2020) pointed out that due to the coronavirus, most states in the United States were forced to close all schools in March 2020.

According to UNESCO (2020), approximately 90% of the world's students over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries have had their education interrupted. This was described as the largest simultaneous shock to all education systems in our lifetimes (World Bank 2020). According to Sintema (2020) Governments across Africa through the ministry of health announced that all schools, colleges, and universities closed indefinitely amid fears of the COVID-19 pandemic. The affected number of students equals 90% of the world's enrolled students (UNESCO, 2020) and the shutting down of schools has widened learning inequalities and hurt vulnerable children and youth disproportionately.



Despite the low rates of infections among children, school closures were considered a critical pillar of the social distancing tools to mitigate the spread of the disease and avoid an acceleration of cases that were to put a strain on health services. Its effectiveness as a measure to slow down the spread of contagion depended on the exact timing of the closure, the age structure of the population, and the length of the closure (World Bank, 2020). Basic schools and Universities in Ghana were forced to close by Mid-March 2020. The closure was announced at the time the final year Basic school students were preparing for their Basic Education Certification Examinations (BECE) to be written in June 2020 and final year Senior High School (SHS) students were preparing for their West African Senior School Examination (WASSCE) to be

written in May 2020. The Ministry of Education did not have a solution to the situation at the time. Parents were perplexed, and teachers relied on the Ghana Education service for guidance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more obvious than ever that emergency preparedness and planning have to be applied to instances like these. Unfortunately, we do not appear to have a viable answer to an issue that is going to slow down the entire educational system and exacerbate the divide between the rich and the poor and the hardships and distress endured by disadvantaged kids and adolescents in the nation (UNESCO,2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major disruptor of all spheres of educational systems. The systems at all levels had to be suspended or moved online due to lockdown and social distancing rules, which aimed at limiting the spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19. This significantly affected communities with limited technological infrastructure, access to high-speed internet, and smart device penetration (Azman & Abdullah, 2020; Kummitha, Kolloju, Chittoor & Madepalli, 2021).

Despite this, educational institutions, from pre-school through higher education, in many parts of the world, had to adapt and rapidly adopt online and distance learning models that were enabled by information and communications technology (ICT). While the fundamentals and effectiveness of many of the underlying models, e.g., online learning, distance learning, distributed learning, blended learning, mobile learning, etc., tools and platforms have been studied to some extent in the past Means, Bakia & Murphy (2014), the scale and scope of this adoption have been unprecedented and phenomenal. Many teachers were unprepared for issues such as giving lessons online, troubleshooting pupils' inequitable internet access, and dealing

with food insecurity in their households (Gross & Opalka, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2020; Malkus et al., 2020). Educators had, and continue, to go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the quality and content can be delivered effectively, to ensure that learning outcomes are met. The sudden shift to full online instruction led teachers to adjust their teaching plans, teaching styles, and assessment methods. Learners also faced the challenge of quickly adapting to the “new normal” in an education setting.

Online learning experiences generally are defined as those that rely on the internet and other digital devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) conducted in either a synchronous or asynchronous fashion. When people blithely suggest that “everything is online now”, this does not acknowledge those without such resources. The fundamental requirement of online teaching is reliable internet access and hardware may not be within reach for many families, even in a wealthy country such as the United States (Devine et al., 2020; Fishbane & Tomer, 2020).

A Pew Research Center report estimated that five million children and nearly one-third of families with children ages 6–17 do not have high-speed internet (Horrigan, 2015). Further challenges to online learning include poor internet access, home environments un conducive to online learning, student difficulties with self-discipline and self-directed learning, absence of holistic quality assurance systems, and means of supporting not only learners’ academic learning outcomes but also their social and emotional development (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

For the first time in nearly 10 months, children returned to class after the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ghana Education Service (GES) announced plans to re-open schools. To ensure a smooth and safe re-opening of schools, the Government of Ghana put COVID-19 protocols in place in all schools including early childhood

centres across the country, and provided supplies such as veronica buckets, soap, thermometers, and face masks. Schools were fumigated, disinfected, and mapped to a health facility for identification and treatment of suspected cases of coronavirus. COVID-19 response teams were trained in schools to ensure adherence to the safety protocols (UNICEF, 2021).

Teachers and caregivers had to ensure they take steps to help prevent COVID-19 from entering and spreading among early childhood learners to create a safe environment for the learners. While the COVID-19 pandemic had many remarkable features, the magnitude and speed with which teachers had to react to it and ultimately change all areas of their job are unrivalled. Teachers, ensuring this transition, were thrust into the role of assisting learners to effectively learn in a highly uncertain and ever-changing environment. The present study, therefore, explores the lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Effutu Municipality

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Education plays a particularly significant role in children's health and well-being and has a lasting impact on their lives as adults (Hamad et al., 2018). There is little question that the global health pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to all spheres of human life and education worldwide (d'Orville, 2020; Zhu & Liu, 2020). The rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases around the globe posed a great challenge among education stakeholders as it directly affected the functional roles of educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. The United Nations [UN] (2020), pointed out that approximately 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries have been affected by the largest disruption of educational systems in history due to the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 90% of the total enrolled

learners worldwide experienced nationwide school closures and were confined at home (UNESCO, 2020a). This health crisis persuades various the education sector to reimagine and reshape the present curriculum to design a more sustainable framework according to the needs of the learners in the ‘new normal’ set-up.

The Covid 19 crisis created an unprecedented context that has brought to the fore teacher leadership, creativity, and innovation (Kruse, Hackmann, & Lindle, 2020). Globally, in contexts ranging from places where teachers and learners have no computers, or internet access, to others where online learning took a great leap forward, teachers have worked individually and collectively to find solutions and create new learning environments for their learners to ensure that learning never stopped (Global Education Coalition, 2020).

Individuals become teachers with the expectation that they will spend their days in schools regularly interacting face-to-face with learners (Good & Brophy, 2003). Teacher preparation programmes guide future teachers to speak to groups of learners, prepare group activities, manage the dynamics and diversity of groups of learners, and assess learners daily in their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being and growth. In-person learner and teacher interaction has always been an essential and impactful element of the traditional educational setting (Ross-Hain, 2020). Classroom contact has been the norm. These are the aspects that have always defined teaching and learning. These are the aspects that compound and enhance the vitality of the educational setting, require adaptive expertise among educators, and create dynamic and ever-changing learning spaces. Although other mediums of learning (e.g., virtual and online learning) are viable and valuable educational options, learners and teachers

typically choose to engage in either a synchronous or asynchronous format rather than having be forced upon them (Ross-Hain, 2020).

Although many teachers are accustomed to creating and posting resources and assignments online through a learning management system, few were accustomed to reaching their learners exclusively via the internet (Gewertz, 2020; Gewin, 2020). Teachers were not fully prepared to teach from a screen in an empty and silent classroom (Ross-Hain, 2020). School systems had little time to cultivate strategies or train teachers on best practices for the COVID-19 (Lamb, 2021). The researcher had observed that, in the majority of cases, the COVID-19 pandemic forced early childhood teachers to act without much warning and with little time to prepare. Curriculum activities were modified or condensed, lesson plans adapted, and teaching methods turned on their heads. But, whether via the internet, mobile phone, television, radio broadcast, or restructured in-person classroom environment, teachers continued to provide education to their learners. Informal conversation between the researcher and some cross-section of early childhood teachers within the Effutu Municipality revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic forced teachers to adjust themselves and their environment to address the learning needs of the children. Milman (2020) confirmed that teachers had to make several adjustments to their teaching methods and learning environment during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, but time was not plentiful during this forced transition (Milman, 2020). it has therefore significantly added to the workload of teachers who, at the best of times, face several challenges (Global Education Coalition, 2020).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, apart from media coverage, blogs, and social media posts, researchers and educators have attempted to consolidate their experiences in a large body of academic publications. Several in-depth and focused reviews have also attempted to cover specific aspects that are related to teaching and learning during this period (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Gamage, Wijesuriya, Ekanayake, Rennie, Lambert & Gunawardhana, 2020; Mukhopadhyay, Booth, Calkins, Doxtader, Fine, Gardner, Gonzalez, Mirza, & Jiang, 2020). Ebrahim, Martin, and Excel (2021) conducted a study to investigate early childhood teachers and managers' lived experiences of the COVID-19 epidemic in South Africa during the lockdown. Their study revealed that COVID-19 disruption resulted in entrenched inequities in early childhood service provision and early learning chances. Robosa, Perante, Paras, and Tus (2021) conducted a similar study in the Philippines. They adopted a qualitative approach to examine the experiences and obstacles that public school teachers have experienced in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Lack of resources, student handling, workloads, the emergence of the digital age, which hindered most public teachers' ability to deal with, and finally, teachers' gain positive experience were some of the important findings in their study.

Similarly, Khanal (2020) adopted a phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences of online teaching during the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as the consequences for curriculum and instruction. Initial irritation and struggle, complexities and problems, and hope amidst resource limits were all major discoveries for Khanal (2020). In the heat of the COVID-19, Kainman and Hendriks (2021) conducted research on high school instructors' experiences during online classrooms. Their research took place in Indonesia. Technical concerns and student participants are two important conclusions from their research. Wolf et al. (2021) used

an observational methodology and a longitudinal strategy to investigate Ghana's educators' experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers abandoning the profession, health, and safety, and teachers providing remedial lessons after school was among their important findings. It appears as though many studies have been conducted on the COVID-19 pandemic concerning teachers' experiences. However, based on the researchers' readings, it appears that there have been very few studies undertaken on this topic in Effutu Municipality and that most of the studies that have been conducted on this topic have been done in the western part of the globe. Set against this backdrop, the current study attempts to explore of lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Effutu Municipality.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study sought to explore the lived experiences of teachers at early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality

1.4 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine early childhood teachers views on COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. explore the role of early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID- 19 within the Effutu Municipality.
3. examine the teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Effutu Municipality.

4. explore the challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic in the centres within the Effutu Municipality.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are early childhood teachers views on Covid-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality?
2. What role did early childhood teachers played in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality?
3. What teaching strategies did early childhood teachers employ in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality?
4. What challenges did early childhood teachers encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early childhood centres in the Effutu Municipality?

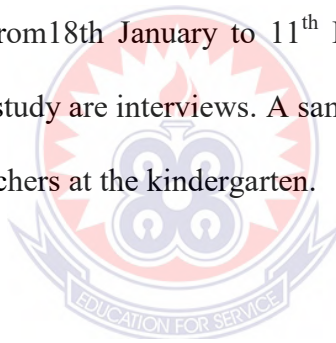
1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways. Most importantly, the study is to bring into light some of the pertinent issues on early childhood teacher's experiences during COVID-19. The outcome of the study will be the basis for which the ministry of education, Ghana education service, educational administrators, and other stakeholders will formulate policies to help early childhood teachers ensure a safe environment in the centres and various early childhood centres. This could be achieved when stakeholders such as teachers, educationists, and interest groups are invited to assist in formulating appropriate goals for learners' safety within the school environment.

The study will also serve as an informative resource for other teachers in the early childhood centres on strategies to employ in teaching and ensuring the Covid- 19 protocols in the early childhood centres. In addition, Empirical evidence that results from early childhood teachers' experiences during COVID-19 will add unto existing literature and serves as literature for other researchers to use as secondary data.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This study focused primarily on the lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in early childhood centres. Geographically, the study is delimited to Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The study is delimited to teachers in kindergarten classes. The study also delimits itself to when schools were reopened from 18th January to 11th December 2021. The instruments which were used for this study are interviews. A sample of 15 was taken for this study and the study covered teachers at the kindergarten.



1.8 Limitations

There were several unique findings in this study that will advance our understanding on the lived experiences of early childhood teachers at early childhood centres during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there were also some limitations that affected the study insignificantly. One of such limitations was the respondents' attitudes during data collection. The respondent's attitude was a primary constraint in my study. Despite having agreed to participate in the interview, five participants chose not to on the scheduled day. The researcher was forced to substitute another teacher for those participants. Furthermore, since the study was conducted in the Effutu Municipality only, it will therefore not be fair to generalize the finding to cover the entire country or even the whole central Region. It is therefore suggested that, further studies are

conducted by researchers to cover wider geographical areas drawing from the finding of the current study, because, the study was limited by its small size geographical boundary.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Terms

Early childhood education: It is an education provision given to children from birth to kindergarten.

COVID-19: It is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

This study is made up of five chapters. The first chapter contains the background to the study, a statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation, and operational definitions of terminology. The second chapter focus on a review of related literature. Literature on the lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic also includes both theoretical and empirical information. The third chapter focus on the research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling procedure, data collection method, data analysis, and trustworthiness, which covers methodology. The fourth chapter also focuses on a detailed discussion of findings from data collected from the field. The fifth chapter focus on the summary of the research, conclusions, and recommendation for further studies.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the research topic by giving the background. The statement of the problem discussed existing literature on the phenomenon under study and also the gaps in existing literature which this study seeks to fill. Also, the objectives and research and the research questions that the study seeks to fill were outlined in this

chapter. Significance of the study, delimitation and organisation of the study were also stated in this chapter.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Overview

This chapter presents the literature on the lived experiences of teachers at Early Childhood Centres during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter would be discussed under the following sub-topics:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. Conceptual Framework
3. Concept of Early Childhood Education
4. Concept COVID-19 Pandemic
5. General safety practices of teachers at the early childhood centres
6. Early childhood teachers view on COVID-19 pandemic
7. Role of early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment in early childhood centres during COVID-19
8. Teaching Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Employed in Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic
9. Challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Viral Modernity Theory (Peters, 2020)

The study is underpinned by Peter's (2020) Viral modernity theory. The viral modernity theory postulates that viruses impact human lives and revolutionize our way of living. The theory further states that the virus's impact on humans banished panic and better medical knowledge and surveillance of virus in related infectious

diseases invoke fear, making people hyper and of pandemic threats which they have been previously ignorant. Advancing the argument, Peters (2020), observed that the media play part in fueling the panic, hysteria, and stigma associated with infectious disease outbreaks. Peter (2020) further observed that large epidemics such as COVID-19 have always been significant in influencing society and cultures. Inferring from this, the pandemic and epidemics reform our normal way of living subjecting us to live in a new normal.

Contextualizing this, the COVID-19 pandemic has modified the way of life in the early childhood setting. Practitioners within the enterprise adopt or adhere to new practices to meet the pandemics protocol demand. Given this, the study used Peters Viral Modernity theory to examine the lived experiences of teachers at the early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic

The researcher decided to use the viral modernity theory as a framework in this study because the researcher found out that the viral modernity by Peters (2020) states that when it comes viruses and pandemics it changes our way of doing things in the society or in the community. The viral modernity theory further states that pandemics makes people practice a new norm and the new norm becomes our culture. The COVID-19 made teachers who teach at the early childhood changed their way of doing things at the early childhood centres. This theory helped me to understand, answer and analysed research question two and three which has to do finding out the teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed in teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and the role early childhood teachers played in ensuring a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

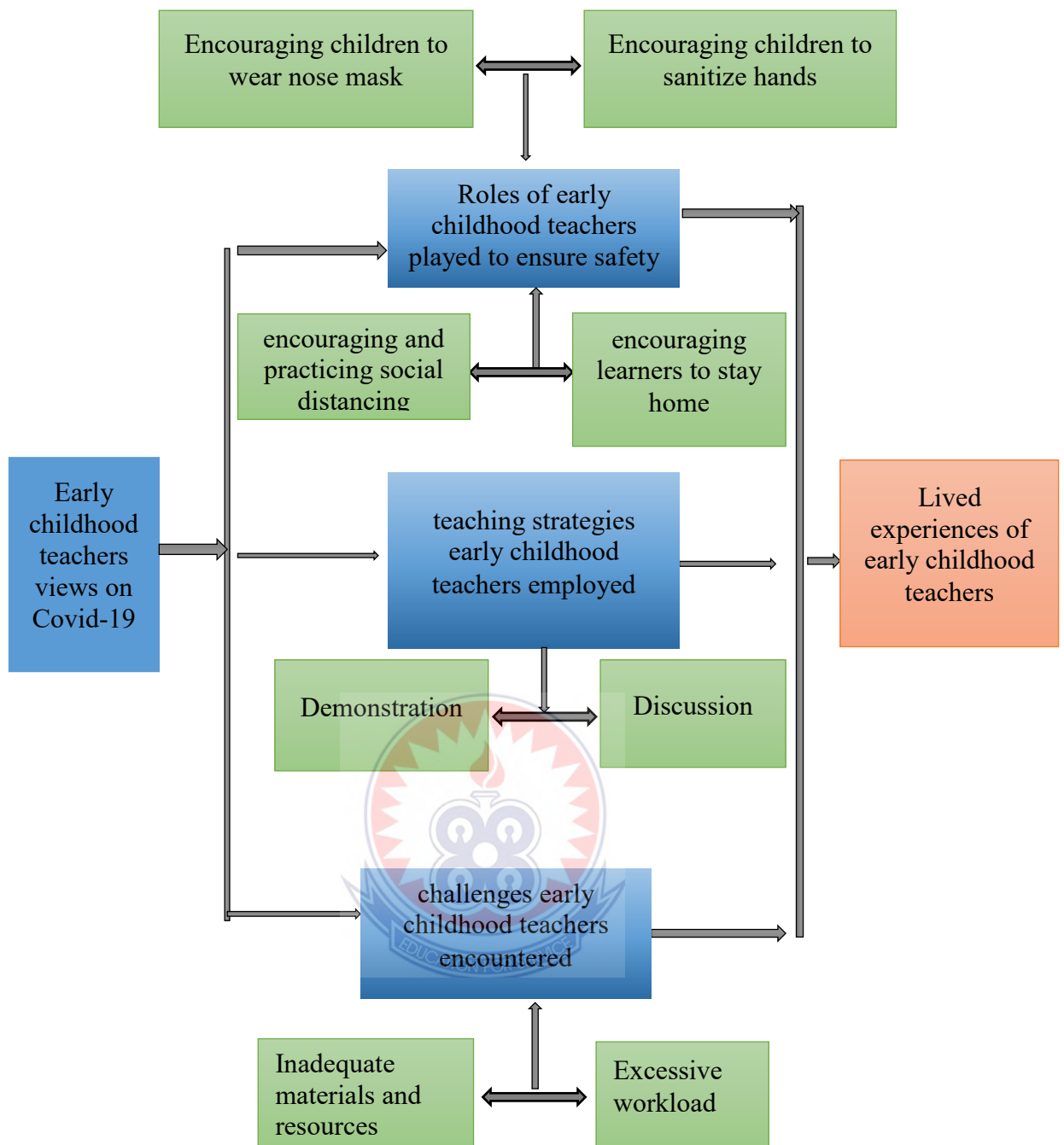


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

This study conceptualized that the covid-19 pandemic has impacted the activities and the lives of teachers at the early childhood level. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the teachers went through series of experiences to ensure learning thrive amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The covid-19 pandemic has affected early childhood educators' responsibility in creating a safe environment during the Covid-19 pandemic, the teaching strategies employed while teaching throughout the pandemic,

and the difficulties they faced all changed as a result of the pandemic. Constituting the roles the teachers played in ensuring safety were ensuring that the children wore their nose masks throughout the school hours; encouraging learners to wash and sanitize their hands regularly; encouraging and practicing social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting indoor and outdoor learning environment and encouraging learners to stay home when they are sick. This reduced the possibility of students getting the COVID-19 pandemic among the learners. Again, they employed teaching strategies that were fit with the framework of World Health Organisation and Ministry of Education's protocols to preventing Covid-19 pandemic. They strategies could not allow them to maximize teaching and learning but contributed immensely to curtailing the spread of the pandemic among the learners. Nonetheless, there were some level of challenges for the teachers at the early childhood centres during the COVID-19. Some of the challenges teachers faced included difficulty in getting materials and resources such as nose masks, sanitizer, veronica buckets, and water to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulty in ensuring that the learners followed the COVID-19 guidelines each day, stressful conditions was a result of the workload, difficulty in finding quarantine space for learners who might have COVID-19, difficulty in using online modules and technology during the COVID-19 as a result of poor network and inadequate gadgets. All of these elements are designed to reflect the actual experiences early childhood educators had throughout COVID-19.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Early childhood education

Children's early childhood education began in the 1500s when Martin Luther was credited with inventing the concept of educating children (1483-1546). Luther felt that children should be taught to read independently for them to have access to the Bible when they grow up (Bonny,2017). Early childhood education is a phrase that refers to formal and informal educational programs that influence the growth and development of children during their preschool years. Early childhood education includes both formal and informal educational programs (Negussie, 2022). Early childhood education, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), is the period from birth to eight years, during which time children are prepared for primary school. Early childhood education provides children with development and learning opportunities that are not available to them in their home environment (Gwang & Mami, 2010). Beginning at conception and continuing until they reach the age of eight, early childhood education promotes the holistic development of children, including their physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) 2018. Early childhood education is a broad term that refers to any type of educational program that serves children in their pre-school years before they are old enough. Kapur (2018) further noted that early childhood education is valued up until the age of eight to help the kid develop a seamless grasp of the entire educational system from playgroup to pre-primary and from pre-primary to primary levels. An extremely critical era of a child's existence occurs throughout his or her early childhood. At this stage, the child's emotional, psychological, and physical development are all taking place. Children's academic readiness and social-emotional

development are aided by early childhood education (Philips, Mark, Kenneth, Ron Haskis, Bassok, Magaret, Greg, Mark, Katherine & Christiana, 2015).

Early childhood education, according to Gonzalez-Mena (2008), is a unique field of education that works with children from infancy through third grade. Early childhood growth occurs at a rate that outpaces any other stage of life, from conception to the first, timid steps into kindergarten centres (Shonkoff, Philips & Deborah, 2000). Language and reading abilities, thinking skills, self-confidence, self-control, and thinking skills are all developed during early childhood education. At this stage of this stage, children are dependent on their caregivers, including parents, day providers, babysitters, extended family, and teachers (Negussie, 2022). Ampadu and Ofose (2007), point out that early childhood education is the process or approach deliberately intended to affect the developmental changes for those below the age of eight years and the foundation stage where children develop their potentialities and capabilities of the future. At this stage, everything about the child should be child-centered to help the child develop. The development of intelligence, affective and social relation occurs in the first three years of life (UNICEF, 2003). Successful early childhood care lays the foundation for creativity, imagination, self-reliance, and survival of the child (Asenso-Boakye, 2005). The objectives of early childhood education are to improve the health and physical abilities of a child, develop social and emotional health through the encouragement of self-confidence, self-discipline, curiosity, and spontaneity, and increase the ability of the child to relate well with his or her family, establish a pattern of expectations of the success of the child and lastly, enhance the sense of dignity and self-warmth with the child and his family (Ampadu & Ofose, 2007 cited in Magaret et al., 2013). Badu, Agbevivi and Subbey (2022) also abridged the objectives of early childhood Education as to provide opportunities for

overall personal development of the child through individual play and to predispose the child to conditions of formal education to accelerate the learning process during formal schooling.

2.3 The COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is a highly contagious and severe viral infection caused by the acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus, which first appeared in Wuhan, China, and later spread throughout the world. Although the COVID-19's primary reservoir was thought to be an infection from the bat, the virus may have originated from human seafood in Wuhan, China, where snakes, raccoon dogs, and palm civets, among other animals, are sold (Gamtessa, 2020). A pandemic is described as "the rapid spread of a new illness throughout the world" World Health Organization (WHO), 2010). The virus spreads by coming into contact with contaminated surfaces or an infected person, and then through droplets of saliva or mucus released into the air or on the hand when the person coughs or sneezes (Nantwi & Bamfo, 2021). Symptoms of the COVID-19 include fever, dry cough, common cold, headaches, running nose, sore throat, body pains, and difficulty in breathing (Nishiura, 2020).

In December 2019, China received cases of COVID-19 at Wuhan, China. Cases began to occur in other provinces in early and mid-January 2020, owing to increased population movement over the Chinese New Year holidays, as well as in other countries, including Thailand, the United States, South Korea, and Japan, due to increased international travel (Altakarli, 2020). Africa was the last continent to receive confirmed cases according to Altakarli (2020). The continent's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Egypt on February 14, 2020, while the first case of COVID-19 from Sub-Saharan Africa was reported in Nigeria on February 27, 2020,

from an Italian patient who went to Nigeria from Italy on February 25, 2020 (WHO, 2020). The epidemic has had an impact on every aspect of human life, including religious activities, funerals, business, education, public healthcare systems, and sociocultural gatherings and activities (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020). According to World Economic Forum estimates, about 1.6 billion children in 195 countries were unable to attend school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Ghana Health Service (2020), Ghana received its first case of COVID-19 on 12 March 2020 and as of 29th May 2020, Ghana recorded 7303 confirmed cases, 34 deaths, and 2412 recoveries. By the end of December 2020, Ghana was the fifth country with the highest number of cases in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Africa, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. On March 16th, 2020, President H. E. Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo implemented a lockdown on Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi because of an outbreak of the Coronavirus in Ghana, following recommendations from the Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, and the Ghana Medical Association. By mid-March 2020 schools were closed. On 16th March 2020 Schools ranging from kindergarten, primary, junior and senior high to tertiary institutions including universities both public and private were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Ministry of Education, MOE (2020), the closure of schools affected 9.2 billion learners from KG -SHS and about 500,000 tertiary learners. The closure of schools disrupted academic calendars and also affected teaching and learning especially impacting the negatively low performance of students Ministry of Education (MoE), (2020). Students were to continue with their learning from home through online learning. Some teachers, parents, and students faced challenges using the online approach to teach students, especially learners from creche to kindergarten. The good thing about the crisis, say, to Roache, Rowe-Holder,

and Muschette (2020) is that it sparked the growth of distance learning. Teachers and learners are used to face to face tradition of teaching. All of these were done to stop the spread of the COVID-19 in Ghana.

After nine months of school closure in Ghana, the president of Ghana His Excellency Nana Akufo Addo announced in his 21st COVID-19 update to Ghanaians on Sunday evening, that all schools ranging from kindergarten, primary, and JHS will open school on 15th January 2021 (BBC News,2021). According to President Nana Akufo Addo in his 21st COVID-19 update he stated safety measures will be put in place to prevent students from contracting the COVID-19 and all schools were fumigated before students arrive in schools. Nose masks, face shields, and gloves were given to schools by GES to schools in Ghana to help the spread of the disease. Ghana Educational Service brought up some guidelines for school re-opening during the COVID-19 for Safe and Healthy Schools in Ghana. According to the director-general of Ghana Educational Service Prof. Kwasi Opoku Amankwaa, the guidelines are to help Regional and District Directors of Education, as well as Heads of Schools, operate safely in the country Ghana Education Service (GES), (2021).

2.4 General Safety Practices of Teachers in the Early Childhood Centres

As more children enroll in schools across Africa, teachers and educational institutions must prioritize maintaining a safe and peaceful atmosphere (UNESCO, 2018). As an early childhood educator, it is your responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of your students. As more children are enrolling in school in Africa, creating a safe and peaceful environment must be a top priority of teachers and educational institutions (UNESCO, 2018). It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure the safety and well-being of students who are in their charge. Children are active explorers who

explore their environment with their senses. As a caregiver or teacher is your role to create a safe environment for learners. Hand washing should be a standard procedure in early childhood centres every day.

Omari, Zotor, Baah-Tuahene and Arthur (2022) also indicated that hand washing should be a typical part of your daily routine: before and after mealtimes, after bathroom breaks, and during messy moments in the centres, another healthy practice is to children wash their hands upon entry to the centres to help remove germs brought from the outside. Teachers need to use an alcohol-based sanitiser to sanitize all of the tables, chairs, toys, and other surfaces in the centres (Omari, Zotor, Baah-Tuahene & Arthur, 2022). Hand-washing and the availability of diapering equipment were also shown to minimize disease among children in out-of-home child care centres by Kotch et al., (2007). In a recent study, researchers from Michigan State University observed 3,749 persons leaving the restroom. Only 66.9% of participants used soap; 10.3% did not wash their hands at all; 23% simply wet their hands (dubbed "attempted washing"); and only 5.3 percent spent 15 seconds or longer washing, massaging, and rinsing their hands (Unisan, 2017). If children are taught how to wash their hands properly, they are likely to continue into their adulthood. Laurence (2020) points out that some young people are reluctant to wash their hands. A caregiver or instructor can use rhymes or songs to accompany hand washing, either to describe what should be done or to keep track of how long it takes. Viruses should be avoided by wiping touched places in the school environment, such as toilet handles, doorknobs, and taps, according to Laurence (2020). She also emphasizes the importance of cleaning children's toys and play environments before and after play as a teacher. In a school context, children's chairs and other furniture should be cleaned regularly.

A study conducted by Obeng (2008) in Indiana, noted that 32% of teachers who were a participant in her study reviewed that they incorporated handwashing into their centre's activities. According to Obeng (2008), teachers reported that activities done by hand washing included the appropriate use of handwashing soaps and handwashing towels, and letting the children know when to wash their hands. Her study also indicated that sixteen percent of the teachers included activities focusing on the mouth covering during coughing. Teachers who did this activity said it was done three or four times per week in the centres. Four percent of the teachers incorporated activities on keeping harmful things out of the mouth. In her work, teachers stated that they checked the children regularly to ensure that things were kept out of their mouths (Obeng, 2008). Teachers and caregivers should have a changing area where nappy changing can be done. Teachers and caregivers should check toddlers and infants regularly to see whether there would be a need for a nappy change. Kid kinder childcare (2021), suggested some key aspects of nappy changing which are: there needs to be a designated nappy changing area, nappy changing area should be well-stocked with all relevant supplies such as gloves, paper towels, plastic bags, fresh nappies, clean clothes, bin liners and anything else deemed necessary, hands of the child and the care's should be washed after each nappy is changed, nappy changing table/mat should be washed down with warm soapy water after use, at the end of each day, and lastly the entire nappy change area should be thoroughly cleaned with warm water and detergent. When safety is ensured in the school environment, it helps children to build relationships, become confident, and meet their potential. Therefore, this study implies looking at the safety practices of teachers towards COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality in the central region of Ghana.

2.5 Early Childhood Teachers views on COVID-19 within the Effutu

Municipality

Early childhood, which spans from birth to age five, is a time of substantial physical, social, and cognitive development (Goldfield et al., 2012; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020). Thus, early childhood education (ECE) and care settings have a significant influence on the choices that future adults make about healthy behaviour (Herman et al., 2009). According to Hamad et al. (2018), education is especially important for the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents and has a long-lasting effect on their adult lives. Undoubtedly, the global health crisis of COVID-19 has brought about unparalleled disruptions to every aspect of human existence, including education, across the globe (d'Orville, 2020; Zhu & Liu, 2020). Over 90% of all enrolled students globally faced national school closures and were restricted at home between late March and early April of 2020, according to estimations from UNESCO (2020a). Again, 1.2 billion schoolchildren had their education suspended as a result of COVID-related school closures. (UNESCO, 2020a). The Centres for Disease Control (2020), Gudbjartsson et al. (2020), Tagarro et al. (2021), and other studies suggest that children are not at the forefront of the pandemic in terms of acquisition and transmission risk. However, it is crucial to recognise the indirect effects of the pandemic on them, as children have experienced major disruptions in their daily routines related to home and family life, early childhood education, and care (Barlett et al., 2020).

Turning the spotlight to Africa, Ghana has the highest rates of ECE enrollment in Sub-Saharan Africa; nonetheless, there are issues with the quality of ECE in Ghana (UNICEF, 2019). From March to December 2020, schools were closed due to the pandemic, but due to a shortage of learning resources or technology, children had

significant difficulty accessing remote learning, despite the Ministry of Education's quick design and implementation of instructional TV and radio programmes for elementary school pupils (Wolf et al., 2021). Additional problems included overcrowded homes, inadequate learning space, lack of access to energy (particularly in remote regions), and support from parents and teachers (UNICEF, 2021).

In numerous nations, preschools were closed to lessen the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which first surfaced in December 2019, and to relieve pressure on the healthcare system (UNESCO, 2020). As a result, many nations have continued to engage in education in online environments employing digital technology, despite the challenges faced by educators, students, and parents (Spiteri, 2021; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has led to a shift in education from traditional classroom settings to online learning. However, there is debate over whether online learning is better for children (Kim, 2020). For stakeholders and education systems, abrupt changes included the closing of educational facilities and the transition to online delivery of instructional activities, which affected children's academic performance, mental health, and general well-being (Engzell et al., 2021; Lee, 2020). Furthermore, given that early childhood educators and families play a variety of roles in areas like learning, caring, and social support, preschool closures may have placed a significant burden on stakeholders in the field of early childhood education (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013).

Compared to teachers at other educational levels, early childhood educators play various roles; thus, according to Kostelnik and Grady (2009), a preschool teacher's job is to instruct and promote the learning of the young students by offering them emotional support and direction. Furthermore, Van Laere et al. (2012) noted that early

childhood educators have a variety of tasks, including fostering a relationship between parents and preschoolers, monitoring the development and learning of the students, and supporting the child's overall growth. The pandemic's unexpected shift to remote learning, however, has resulted in emergency online teaching (Murphy, 2020), and this has presented teachers with new issues, like helping children as well as parents with their children's learning and development (Judd et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Many teachers acknowledged the difficulty of converting classes from a traditional classroom to an online format since the start of the school closures, and many believe that this arrangement was unsustainable and tiresome (Turner et al., 2020). Instructors encountered numerous novel obstacles, such as diminished correspondence with students and their families, amplified technological hindrances, and learners choosing to abstain from learning entirely (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Some educators went so far as to assist colleagues who were new to online learning in setting up their classes. In addition to all of this, the pandemic and its associated isolation and quarantine regulations meant that many instructors had to take on more household obligations. For instance, teachers who had children in school were suddenly required to supervise and care for their own children's education in addition to teaching and interacting with other learners remotely, which caused a tremendous amount of stress (Kosir et al., 2020).

Early childhood educators made great efforts to minimise learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns by giving learners enough work to ensure they did not fall behind and by being accessible for communication with learners while also isolated at home (Wang et al., 2020). An increase in work-related anxiety was observed in teachers, according to research on their well-being and perspectives

during the lockdown in England (Allen et al., 2020). Though instructors reported higher levels of worry, Allen et al. (2020) also reported improvements in other areas of their well-being, such as having more energy because they spent most of their time at home and did not do much physical activity.

In an attempt to stop the transmission of the virus, Ghana, like the majority of nations, implemented mobility restrictions (lockdown) in locations including schools, workplaces, and international borders during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sibiri et al., 2022). The government enforced social distance norms and placed certain limits on social gatherings from March to April 2020 (Sibiri et al., 2022). The government's decision to close schools for around nine months of the year was the most significant policy put into place during the pandemic (Boatang-Pobee et al., 2021). Children were kept at home while parents or guardians were allowed to return to work as long as they followed COVID-19 protocols and guidelines (mask wearing and social distancing) (Boatang-Pobee et al., 2021; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). The majority of early childhood care facilities in the nation stayed closed during the pandemic, despite the dire need for childcare. Many preschool instructors felt the financial effects of these forced closures (Fuchs-Schündeln et al., 2022). Preschool teachers' experiences and opinions during the COVID-19 pandemic were studied by Obeng et al. (2020), who reported that the participants were terrified and thought the pandemic would be the end of humanity. Once more, participants discussed the increased burden that the pandemic brought about as well as the financial difficulties they had because they were unable to make ends meet as a result of not being able to teach since schools remained closed even after employees were allowed to return to work. The increased awareness of the necessity of practicing hygienic conduct in their

classroom was another benefit mentioned by the participants as a result of the pandemic.

2.6 The Role of Early Childhood Teachers in Ensuring a Safe Environment in Early Childhood Centres During COVID-19.

While people across the world take precautions to protect themselves, their families, and their communities from coronavirus illness (COVID-19), it is also critical that children continue to study in an environment that is accepting, courteous, inclusive, and supportive to everyone United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO), 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into focus the integral relationship between the health and education of children, and the deep inequities in both. The role of an early childhood teacher is to provide a stimulating learning atmosphere, inspire experimentation, and lead and extend the thinking of the students, frequently through informal questioning or dialogue teaching tactics (Masello, 2014). Early childhood teachers must provide a safe and healthy environment for learners in the early childhood centres. Now that school has reopened and possession has been reclaimed, safeguards must be taken both outside and inside the centres to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

According to United Nations Children's Fund 2020, as teachers knowing the facts about COVID-19 will not only protect yourself but also your learners. Teachers need to understand COVID-19 how it spread and how we can protect ourselves and others is an important first step in establishing centres procedures and protocols (UNICEF,2020). In addition, schools can play important role in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 disease. COVID-19 control efforts can benefit from the involvement of schools. Educators can help spread awareness about COVID-19 and

prevent it from spreading inside their schools. Students and staff should be protected against social stigma and discrimination through school plans that minimize disruptions to teaching and learning. Everyday practices such as encouraging students to clean their hands, social distancing, wearing the nose mask, and social distancing can help curb the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

The Department of basic Education, of the Republic of South Africa (2020) committee's report for guidance for childcare facilities and schools regarding preparedness and response to COVID-19 recommended some protocols that can be taken before COVID-19 enters the school community. Their report suggested that there should be health promotion in the school community. Similarly, the committee reviewed that when it comes to health promotion in schools, the school community makes sure that everyone in the school has up-to-date information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from a genuine resource such as international reputation sources like WHO. When it comes to health promotion the committee proposed that school administrators can support the school by sharing resources with staff, families, and age-appropriately with learners. Another Recommendation by the department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa (2020) is to monitor and plan for absenteeism in the school community.

The Department also gave the idea that there should be a review of attendance and sick policies in the school community, School heads and administrators should encourage learners and staff to stay home when they are sick, and teachers should discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives awards as they may encourage learners to come to school. The school community should create communication plans for the school was another recommendation by the department

of basic Education, of the Republic of South Africa (2020). The department advocates that there should be strategies for sharing information with staff and learners in the school.

A similar study conducted by Paola, Christiana, Anne, Louisa, Catherine, Jason, and Mogan (2021), indicated some adaptations to increase children's and teachers' safety in the Universal pre-kindergarten centres in Boston in the USA. The reopening plans of the universal pre-kindergarten centres included a range of changes to enhance health and safety and practice social distancing. The authors noted that part of the reopening plans of Universal pre-kindergarten centres included Instruction and routines, family communication and safety practices, and cleaning. Eighty-seven centres part of the study conducted by Paola, Christiana, Anne, Louisa, Catherine, Jason, and Mogan (2021), reported that the most common change in centres when it comes to instruction and routines is providing individual learning materials to children and Seventy percent use visible masks to indicate children's personal space.

About fifty-seven people in the centres also reported using staggered schedules to avoid contact between group whiles thirty-five reported increasing the amount of time for individual play (Paola et al 2021). Updating children's contact information regularly and securing bilingual written and verbal communication are some of the strategies to maintain effective communication with families (Paola et al). Centres part of the study also planned to designate additional staff and areas for isolation for children who might fall ill in care and need monitoring while maintaining required ratios within centres (Paola et al., 2021). Seventy-eight centres planned to implement a screening protocol at children's arrival, which required dedicated staff and, most likely, investment to adapt facilities and obtain health equipment (Paola et al., 2021).

Centres were also asked to dedicate time before or after children arrive to clean surfaces and disinfect materials in sixty-five percent of centres, and teachers were assigned to dedicated cleaning in seventeen percent of the centres according to Paola et al. (2021). Forty- three percent of the centres under study planned to enhance cleaning contracts or hire additional staff for cleaning tasks (Poala et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Sheila, Nakamura, Granja, chow, Grindal and Perez (2021), looked at early childhood Education throughout the COVID-19. In their study, they indicated Early childhood Educator's practices during the pandemic. The sample size of their study was 400 licensed Arkansas Educators. According to Sheila, Nakamura, Granja, Chow, Grindal and Perez (2021) many teachers use directive centres practices as compared to before the pandemic. Teachers who were participants in the study reported that they have changed some teaching practices in response to the pandemic (Sheila et al., 2021). A number of these practices reflect teachers engaging in more directive behaviours toward children than before the pandemic. Sixty -two percent of early childhood teachers who were participants in the study reported that they restrict the number of children in a play area as compared to before the pandemic. Over half of Sixty-two percent of the teachers who were also part of the study also reviewed that they assign children to specific activities rather than giving children choice in their activities. In their study, Early childhood educators reviewed that they request children not to touch each other and keep a distance from one another. Sixty-seven teachers in early childhood centres reported that they engage in less physical contact with children as compared to before the pandemic. Participants in the study reviewed that there is a change in how often they request children to limit physical contact with each other. Teachers also reported that they hug pat, or hold children less often than they did before the pandemic. According to Sheila, Nakamura, Chow, Grindal, Kirby

and Perez (2021), in the focus group teachers said they are finding it difficult to restrict physical affection in the schools. Fifty -three percent of teachers in Arkansas reported that they assign children to small groups for daily activities.

Teachers who were a participant in the study communicated that they assign children to small and stable groups for daily centres activities. Ninety-three percent of the teachers also indicated that limited children engaged with peers in their small groups, while twenty-nine percent reported restricting children's activities. Fifty-four percent of the participant reviewed that children in small groups play daily in centres, and their choice of the centre is limited.

2.7 Challenges Early Childhood Teachers Encountered During the COVID-19

Pandemic

The COVID-19 has had a huge impact on educational activities around the world, disrupting traditional educational standards, and as a result, teaching and learning have taken on a new dimension(Nantwi & Boateng, 2020). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, early childhood educators have been obliged to examine pedagogical techniques to provide quality education to students and make modifications to their curriculum and instruction (Akram, Aslam, Saleem & Parveen, 2021). Teachers are one of the most powerful and important factors in promoting equity, access, and quality in education, and they are critical to long-term development. However, the COVID-19 outbreak and resulting school closures have had a negative impact on them as well as global education systems (Azevedo & Pedro, 2020).

Before COVID-19, it was known that the majority of Early Childhood Education (ECE) instructors had high levels of satisfaction and commitment to their work

(Kwon et al., 2022; Bullough, Hall-Kenyon & MacKay, 2012). Other obstacles and problems, such as income discrepancies, perks, resources, and difficult working circumstances, however, outweigh job satisfaction and dedication and act as workplace stressors (Kwon et al., 2022; Linnan, 2017; Whitebook et al., 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic, unfortunately, has certainly worsened issues to teachers' jobs and well-being (Kwon et al., 2021; Swigonski et al., 2021). The epidemic needed quick changes in teaching and learner support, all of which fell firmly on the shoulders of teachers. The demands were exacerbated by a shifting landscape as schools and communities were pressured to re-open (Collie, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2020). Such demands have resulted in unprecedented stress, putting teachers' short- and long-term well-being in jeopardy. Many teachers deal with comparable stress and obligations in their personal lives (Harris & Jones, 2020).

The COVID-19 period has been dubbed a "triple pandemic" by Papaioannou et al. (2020) referring to not only the disease but also the physical inactivity and mental illness that followed. Throughout the pandemic, numerous researchers have quietly exposed the negative consequences of social limitations, "shelter-at-home," and online learning on adults (Lesser & Nienhuis, 2020). Teachers have endured a major influence on their psychological, physical, and professional well-being, according to empirical studies undertaken in numerous nations throughout the world, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Spain, and Portugal (Swigonski, et al., 2021, Alves, Lopes & Precioso, 2021; Kim & Asbury, 2020). For example, Swigonski et al. (2021) discovered that physical and behavioral stress symptoms among early childhood instructors in the United States were 2–3 times higher than in the general population during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Similarly, Alves et al. (2021) discovered that the pandemic has lowered teachers' sense of professional well-being, making them more unsure about their future career prospects. In crises such as the COVID-19 epidemic, the role of teachers and ECE centres becomes even more important, as learners and families look to teachers for more psychosocial assistance (Ozmiz-Etxebarria). Ozmiz-Etxebarria (2021) found that preschool and primary grade instructors working in a university nursery school had the highest ratings of psychological symptoms like anxiety. Teachers and early childhood education centres/schools are expected to act as the "great equalizer," giving additional social-emotional learning and educational chances to vulnerable students who are more prone to be affected in such situations (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006; Lundie & Law, 2020). As a result, it is vital to look into ECE teachers' working conditions and well-being during the pandemic in general, but holistic studies of working conditions and well-being, particularly for Ghanaian ECE instructors, are few.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many ECE centres and schools switched to online learning, while others stayed open, causing significant changes in the nature and scope of teachers' professional life and work. While research suggests that the epidemic has harmed teachers' well-being (Alves, Lopes, & Precioso, 2021), some studies have found that these effects might vary depending on many contextual and individual factors, such as teaching modality and teacher demographics. During the early months of the pandemic, some instructors found themselves unemployed, while others saw their duties increase (Nagasawa & Tarrant, 2020; Porter, Bromer, Ragonese-Barnes & Molloy, 2020).

Because of the chronic health conditions that accompany this vulnerable workforce, teachers who continued to teach in person during the pandemic were at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 [Porter, Bromer, Ragonese-Barnes, & Molloy, 2020; Claxton, Levitt, & Kamal, 2020]. These dangers were almost certainly affected by the unique challenges and conditions that accompanied ECE teachers' in-person practice. Having a large group of children in a limited space or having youngsters in close proximity during normal activities, for example, certainly made social distance difficult (Nagasawa & Tarrant, 2020; Claxton, Levitt & Kamal, 2020). The additional responsibilities of taking precautions and continually telling young children to stay apart, wear masks, and wash their hands were surely demanding and difficult for ECE teachers (Claxton, Levitt & Kamal, 2020).

Desks should be at least three feet apart whenever possible, and everyone should wear a mask, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC, 2021). Learners should be six feet apart if they are not wearing masks, such as when eating lunch. It is recommended that learners eat "instructional lunch" rather than going to the cafeteria for lunch (New York Department of Education, 2020). According to Swartz (2021), many students are eager to return to the cafeteria for an actual lunch hour, which provides a difficulty for teachers in persuading them to take "instructional lunch." Swartz (2021) went on to say that having students sit a few feet apart in straight rows in their classes had an impact on their ability to work in groups. At the height of the Covid 19 outbreak, classroom procedures such as conducting group work and even sharing materials were completely abandoned.

Although some of these constraints have been lifted, most teachers will need to re-establish guidelines for working in groups and possibly model acceptable social

relations. This makes it difficult for teachers to help students develop social skills through group activities. It's also important to make sure there's enough air, and teachers should think about learner safety when delivering materials or collaborating during small-group instruction.

Due to the space crunch, Roy (2020) stated that organizing additional quarantine space for ill Children in Childcare Institutes (CCI) residents is herculean and difficult for teachers. As a result, the burden of care in early childhood centres has increased as a result of the supervision of children under physical distance rules with limited staff (Roy, 2020). Few audits of CCI management have found it difficult to explain to children why regulations on social separation were suddenly implemented, causing worry and terror (The Times of India, 2020). The availability of material resources, according to Sundaram et al. (2021), also hindered the application of COVID-19 procedures. According to the authors, insufficient space is a fundamental worry that prevents teachers from implementing small groups and social separation. Due to a lack of storage space, teachers found it difficult to follow instructions to space out desks and remove non-essential things from classrooms (Sundaram et al. 2021). Teachers experience difficulty applying COVID-19 guidelines, according to Viner et al. (2020), because certain classrooms could not be used because they lacked natural ventilation due to the nature of the building design, causing additional space limits. Because the school lacked green space and had limited playgrounds, it was unable to do more activities outside, according to Viner et al. (2020).

During the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, virtual teaching and learning became one of the most common activities in schools (Li & Lalani, 2020). Many students are now comfortable utilizing Google Classroom, watching television, and participating

in Zoom sessions (Li & Lalani, 2020). The spread of the COVID 19 epidemic was slowed as a result of this (Khalil et al., 2020). In contrast to Li and Lalani's (2020) finding, an in-depth examination of an interview with an instructional designer and online language teacher revealed some of the obstacles to online instruction [De Paepe, Zhu, & DePryck, 2018]. Struggling to persuade students to engage with coursework, a lack of proper professional development and training for online teaching, and trouble encouraging students to collaborate with one another were among the challenges. Another issue that teachers confront is that many of the online platforms that are used to educate remotely are unknown to them (Mupinga, 2005). According to De Paepe, Zhu, and DePryck, this could be due to a lack of training and professional development (2018).

According to some studies, teachers who teach online may have endured a particular set of pressures. For example, Besser, Lotem and Zeigler-Hill (2022) found out that abrupt shifts to online teaching were associated with greater levels of psychological stress among teachers. An international survey of 600 language teachers found out high levels of stress-related to increased workload, family health, loss of control over work decisions, blurred professional and personal lines, concerns about their colleagues and most vulnerable learners, social isolation, and the stress of online teaching itself (MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2020). Similarly, Allen, Jerrim and Sims (2020) discovered high stress levels in teachers teaching online in the United Kingdom during the early stages of the pandemic; however, those teaching in-person had higher stress levels for long periods. Returning to in-person learning makes it harder for teachers to maintain control over students' compliance with the protocols. Although ECE teachers who teach online are likely to suffer similar pressures, there is limited research in the Effutu Municipality about how these factors influenced them.

2.8 Teaching Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Employed in Teaching

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 is a classic adaptive and transformative challenge for educators, one for which no predetermined playbook may guide acceptable responses (Remeirs et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning environment, teaching methods, policies, and national standards of the Early Childhood sector (Jikpamu, 2021). According to Jikpamu (2021), early childhood education aims to allow children to participate in play to develop social skills, emotionally and intellectually. Teachers in the early childhood sector work with children in settings that capitalize on learning interactions and play activities in the physical environment. Educational technology has become an important weapon in the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (Iivari et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all methods of delivery and activities in all sectors of Education including Early childhood Education.

During the COVID-19, the shift from offline education to emergency distance teaching has made teachers feel unprecedented pressure to use technology (Ferdig et al., 2020; Knig et al., 2020; Quezada et al., 2020). Due to the COVID-19 early childhood teachers interact with young children and their families, share text and video resources participate in remote training and meetings, and video resources, participate in remote training and meetings, and deal with daily work affairs by computer-based educational technology, which they hardly ever experienced (Hong, Zhang & Liu 2021). To stop the spread the coronavirus, many countries switched to online education to reduce the harm of coronavirus. Also, teachers have implemented some new tactics in teaching children to avoid children from contracting the COVID-19, that school has resumed and children have returned to school.

A study conducted in Arkansas by Ganga and Smith (2021), revealed that teachers in Arkansas teachers have changed some teaching practices in response to the pandemic. Their study revealed that teachers in the early childhood centres have restricted the number of children in the play area compared to before the pandemic. Ganga and Smith (2021) further noted in their study that early childhood teachers during indoor activities limit children's engagement with peers with their pod. During outdoors, teachers reported that they restrict children's activities. DESE (2021), also posits that Administrators and educators are encouraged to consider ways to create intentionally playful and interactive learning environments such as materials that should be responsive to the interests of individual students and provide a rich, playful learning environment in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.9 Empirical Studies on Lived Experiences of Early Childhood Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Studies examining early childhood educator well-being reflect a holistic concept of well-being, where the individual markers of physical, psychological, social, and emotional health are considered alongside systemic burdens, resources to support staff, and the culture of the workplace (Liu et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted both the fragility and importance of the early education and care sector in Ghana and around the world. Empirical studies have reported on the lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A study by Yıldırım (2021) investigated the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on preschool education and sought answers to how preschool education is implemented, the kind of activities are held, and the kind of challenges needed to be overcome, and the measures needed to be taken to sustain preschool education. The

study consisted of a sample of 25 preschool teachers and 30 parents recruited using criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method. It adopted a phenomenological research design, which is situated in the constructivist paradigm. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide form and video records of participants performing educational practice within two months. Data were analysed using inductive content analysis. The study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic had numerous adverse effects on preschool education and that they held art, science, and mathematics activities and games to sustain education but faced numerous challenges during the process. The study recommended that measures should be taken to sustain preschool education during pandemics. Although education during the COVID-19 pandemic varies from country to country, the study by Yıldırım (2021) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on preschool education only in Turkey, and therefore, the results cannot be generalized, which is the first limitation.

Ebrahim, Martin and Excell (2021) presented a contextual understanding of the lived experiences of early childhood development (ECD) teachers and managers during the lockdown and the opening phases of a risk-adjusted approach. The researchers used a phenomenological lens and systems theory to provide a reality check by focusing on lived experiences. Data were obtained through an online survey with 28 ECD teachers and managers. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with a subset of 8 of the participants. Findings from the study showed that disruptions of COVID-19 led to entrenching inequities in service provision and early learning opportunities. These intersecting dimensions have implications for building effective ECD systems.

Investigating how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way teachers use technology to deliver instructions, Lamb (2021) conducted a phenomenological study to describe

the experiences of teachers as they adapted their instruction to a new platform. The theoretical framework used was the change theory. The research was accomplished by interviewing 11 core-content classroom teachers. Participants described their experiences and approach to the challenges faced while teaching during the uncertainty of the pandemic. The participants in the study described factors that influenced changes in their use of technology and how the different platforms changed the way they used technology for instructional delivery. The researcher used the Change Theory Framework to code responses and identify the internal and external factors that influenced the changes. This study was limited to fifth through eighth-grade teachers in local school systems in the United State.

Ciampa and Jagielo-Manion (2021) described primary teachers' (grades K-3) challenges with remote literacy instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK; Mashra & Koehler, 2006) framework was used to examine the K-3 teachers' challenges when teaching literacy content remotely and the extent to which these three elements (technology, pedagogy, and content) were altered to specifically meet the professional development needs of teachers teaching in an extraordinary situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. An open-ended online questionnaire completed by 300 respondents revealed that providing and administering rigorous, high-quality differentiated beginning reading and writing instruction and assessments in both synchronous and asynchronous learning formats was a challenge. Professional development was relegated to a techno-centric approach to planning remote literacy instruction. The study presented suggestions for dealing with primary grade teachers' instructional challenges and professional development needs associated with remote early literacy teaching, including developing collaborative structures such as virtual

mentor coaching and virtual professional learning networks for planning and assessing remote early literacy instruction.

Hanno, Gonzalez, and Gardner et al. (2020) conducted a study on the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on early education and care in Massachusetts. The study's report described the experiences of early educators and caregivers of 3- and 4-year-old children in family child care, community-based center, Head Start, and public-school prekindergarten programs during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts. Nearly 700 individuals working with young children and their families across the state offered insights into program operations; use of public support; remote engagement with children and families; and personal wellbeing during the pandemic. The study found out that although educators and caregivers across the sector were vulnerable to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, those in family child care programs were particularly affected. Across all provider types, approximately a third of educators and caregivers reported that their incomes had been affected by the pandemic. Among those in family child care, nearly 90% reported their incomes had been affected. Educators and caregivers in family child care programs were also most likely to report pursuing secondary employment as a consequence of the pandemic.

In response to the instability borne from the pandemic, many educators and caregivers reported accessing at least one public support for individuals (e.g., unemployment benefits, cash assistance) or organizations (e.g., small business loans, emergency child care funds). However, usage rates did not appear to be commensurate with the broader reported financial impacts of the pandemic, suggesting that public assistance programs may currently be underutilized by those who could qualify. Again, Hanno et

al. (2020) stated that educators and caregivers reported concerns about their physical and mental wellbeing. The researchers reported that although the majority of educators and caregivers had access to health and safety resources, few had access to mental health supports. Educators and caregivers of all provider types expressed concerns about the potential consequences of their work with young children for their well-being during the pandemic. Whereas the majority of educators reported having access to resources to support healthy practices (e.g., handwashing protocols and cleaning materials), only a third of educators had access to mental health support to help cope with the consequences of the pandemic. The education and care providers we surveyed, those in Head Start programs were the most likely to report that they had access to mental health support.

Ross-Hain (2020) concluded that educators modified curricular content, delivery, and assessment methods to accommodate and engage learners and maintain academic expectations while at the same time attempting to mitigate undue stress for their students. Ross- Hain (2020) reported that teachers met this task with little to no adaptive expertise to draw from, as few had previous experience with distance teaching. Constructivist theory guided this qualitative study exploring teachers' experiences in distance learning through a lens of adaptive expertise. A phenomenological design was applied to data acquired through two rounds of interviews with teachers. The data was analysed through an iterative process of coding, creating categories, and identifying emerging themes. The findings indicated that during the periods of distance learning, teachers modified their course content due to an imposed time constraint, delivery method, and desire not to overwhelm students. These modifications impacted academic rigor and continuity, as well as the assessment of student learning. Additionally, teachers' priorities changed from that

academic progress to that student's well-being. Other teacher takeaways include applications for their future practice in both the traditional and distance learning settings and reflections on how their experiences in distance learning during the spring of 2020 could impact their future as educational professionals.

Randall et al. (2021) adopted a mixed-method approach to examine early care and education (ECE) teachers' working conditions and physical, psychological, and professional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic using a national sample of 1434 ECE teachers in the U.S. The researchers also explored differences in working conditions and well-being among in-person, online, and closed schools, given the unique challenges and risks that ECE teachers may have faced by teaching in these different modalities. From the results of an online survey, they found out that in the early months of the pandemic, many ECE teachers faced stressful, challenging work environments. Some were teaching in new, foreign modes and formats, and those still teaching in-person faced new challenges. They also found out that many common issues and challenges related to psychological and physical well-being across the three teaching groups from the qualitative analysis, but a more complicated picture emerged from the quantitative analysis. After controlling for education and center type, they found that aspects of professional commitment were lower among those teachers teaching in person.

Additionally, there were racial differences across several of our measures of well-being for teachers whose centres were closed. Upon closer examination of these findings via a moderation analysis with teacher modality, Kwon et al. (2022) found out that Black and Hispanic teachers had higher levels of psychological well-being for

some of our indicators when their centres were closed, yet these benefits were not present for Black and Hispanic teachers teaching in person.

A critical review of the above studies revealed that most of them employed phenomenological study and run thematic analysis which might seem much more appropriate. It is also worth noting that some researchers employed a cross-sectional survey and mixed-method approach. However, in the phenomenological studies, the sample sizes were relatively small. Again, the study settings vary and do not share a common characteristic. Moreover studies reviewed above also showed that there were inconsistencies in the findings. This could have been a result of differences in the study areas as well as differences in sample sizes. Hence, this study was conducted using a sample of fifteen participants and within research setting where similar studies have not been conducted.

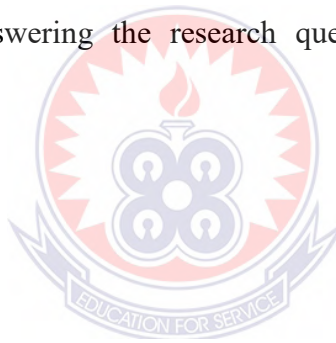
2.10 Summary of Literature Reviewed

Evidence has demonstrated that the COVID-19 Pandemic has affected all domains of education, including Early Childhood Education, according to a studies of literature. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interconnectedness of children's health and education, as well as the severe injustices that exist in both areas. Teachers must acclimate to the new standard, according to evidence. Early childhood educators were forced to employ Educational technology and Educational modules to deliver their lessons to keep their students learning.

Also, in reviewing the literature, it is evident that teachers had to put some measures in place to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in schools and the school environment. Wearing of nose masks is, washing hands, using sanitisers, disinfecting school and social distancing are some of the safety measures. The literature revealed

that teachers employed new strategies in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, the literature brings into light that teachers had gone through such as lot during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, literature was reviewed on the challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study is underpinned by one theory namely viral modernity theory, the viral modernity theory postulates that viruses have an impact on human lives and change their way of living. The theory also indicates that viruses on humans banish panic and better medical knowledge and surveillance of viruses in related infectious diseases invoke fear in making people hyper and of pandemic threats which they have been previously ignorant. This theory is used purposely to help explain and analyse the data that was derived in answering the research questions and achieving the stated objectives.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter represents the design for the study, philosophical position, population, sample, and sampling procedure. This chapter further discussed research instruments, trustworthiness criteria, data collection procedures, data analysis plan, and ethical consideration. the strategies or methodological procedures used to gather and analyse data on early childhood teachers' lived experiences during the COVID-19 epidemic.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

The study is underpinned by the social constructivism paradigm, which is also described as interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2010). According to Creswell (2014) in social constructivism individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live or work. In their view, there is nothing scientific about what we do, what is reality is what comes from society. Understanding the social world can be deepened when we make effort to understand the perspectives of people studied rather than explaining their behaviour through cause and effect (Weber, 1990). In social constructivism, social reality is created through making meaningful interactions between the researcher and the researched-on agreement in the social context (Grbich, 2007; Rugg & Petre, 2007). Kusi (2012) also stated that the social constructivist paradigm is useful in the attempt to understand a phenomenon in all its complexity in a particular socio-cultural context. Kusi further noted that the paradigm recognizes the role of the researcher and the research participants in knowledge construction acknowledging interpretations as socially constructed realities.

3.2 Research Approach

The approach for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014), further noted that qualitative research is conducted because a problem needs to be explored. Vertinsky (2009) also posits that qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, interpretive field of inquiry. They further noted that the qualitative researcher uses predominantly no statistical analytic procedures to generate information from data gathered from field observations, structured interviews, focus groups, case studies, document analyses, and other sources that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives. Denzi and Lincoln's (2000) qualitative research involves the adoption of an interpretative and naturalistic approach to research. This means qualitative research is done in a natural setting. Lindolf and Taylor (2002) aver that qualitative research seeks to preserve and analyse the situation form, content, and experience of social action rather than subject to mathematical or formal transformations. Hancock (2002), opines that qualitative research is concerned with opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals producing subjective data. In the same way that was collected based on participants' experiences and opinions.

A qualitative approach was considered more relevant to undertake this research as it allowed greater capacity to gain more depth and meaning based on an individual teacher's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic opposed to a quantitative approach which is more structured, broader in scale and more numerically based.

3.3 Research Design

A research design is an inquiry within a qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach that provides specific direction for procedures in research (Creswell, 2014). He further noted that research design is the plan of conducting your study. The research design is mostly dependent on the nature of the research and the problem being addressed. Research design is the procedure for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). Research designs in qualitative research consist of narrative research, phenomenology, qualitative content analysis, phenomenological study, and ethnography. In this study, a Descriptive phenomenological design was adopted.

3.4 Phenomenological Design

According to Creswell (2014), a phenomenological design describes a common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Creswell (2013), further noted that in the phenomenological design researchers focus on describing what participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. In phenomenological design, we have the object and the subject. The object is the one who is experiencing the phenomenon and the subject is the person who is having the experience. Kurunchie (2016), also indicated that phenomenology refers to how individuals experience an issue.

Phenomenology intends to study participants' perspectives of an issue concerning their thoughts and feelings of an experience (Kurunchie, 2016). In a phenomenological design, the researcher should have this question in mind when conducting the study: what is the phenomenon, who is experiencing the phenomenon, how they are experiencing the phenomenon, and what meaning they are giving to the

experience (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Creswell (2018), state that, in a phenomenological design, the lived experience of the person should be a conscious one. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further noted that there two types of phenomenology which are descriptive and interpretive phenomenology This study used the descriptive phenomenology because according Moustakas (1994) descriptive phenomenology focuses on bracketing your biases or setting aside your experiences and taking a fresh perspective toward the phenomenom under examination. In a phenomenological design, the researcher brings down individual experiences, describes them, and shows their universal essence In this study, the researcher used a descriptive phenomenological design as a plan in a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 Study Area

The study was conducted in kindergarten centres within the Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. Effutu Municipal is one of the 261 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana and forms part of the 22 of MMDAs in the Central Region, with its administrative capital as Winneba. The Municipality is situated between latitudes 5°16' and 20.18"N and longitudes 0°32' and 48.32"W of the eastern part of the Central Region and covers an area of 82 square kilometers (163 sq miles)

The Municipality lies between Gomoa East District to the west, north, and east flanks. On the southern flank is the Gulf of Guinea. The population of the Municipality according to 2021 population and housing census stands at 107,798 with 54,723 males and 53,075 females.

The Municipality is made up of three circuits for the purposes of education management. There is a total of 247 educational institutions in the Municipality; of which 74 (30%) are public institutions and 173 (70%) are private institutions. The Municipality has 78 pre-schools (24 public and 54 private), 77 Primary Schools (26 Public and 51 Private), and 47 Junior High Schools (22 Public and 25 Private). The Winneba Senior High School is the only public second cycle institution.

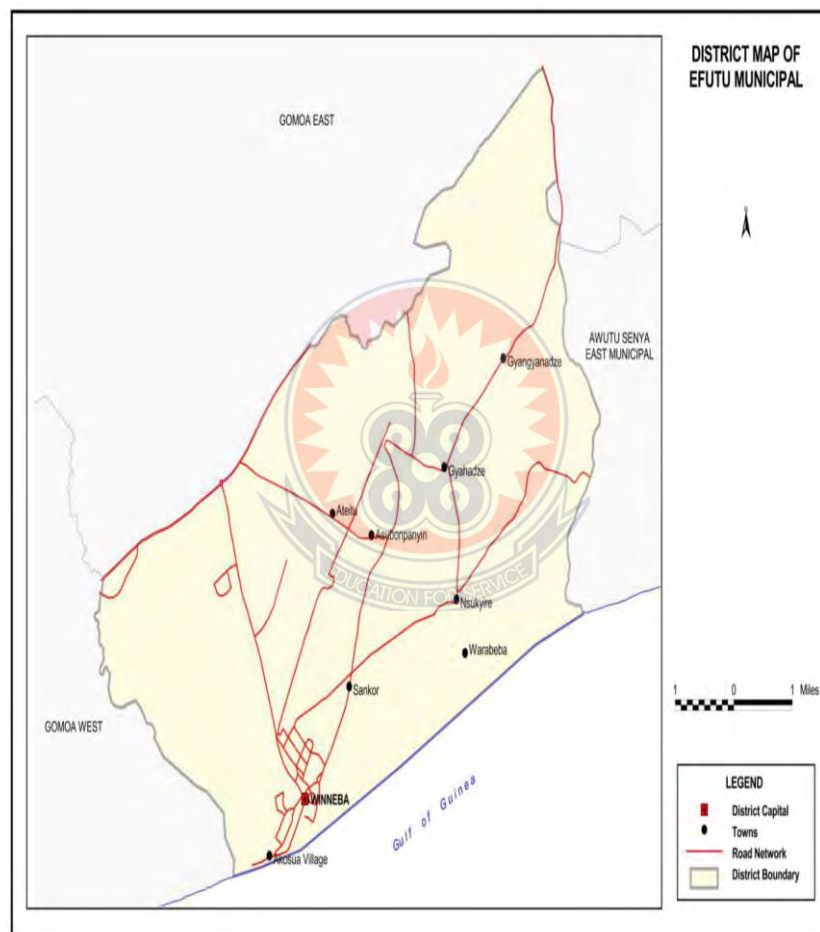


Figure 3.1: Map of Effutu Municipality

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2018)

3.6 Population

The term "population" refers to the bigger group on which research will be focused. The population of the study is the universal collection of participants. The term "population" refers to a comprehensive group of individuals, institutions, and things that have common features and to whom the researcher seeks to apply the findings of the study (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun 2012). The term "population" refers to the bigger group on which your research will be focused. The population of the study is the universal collection of participants (Asiamah et al., 2017). Available data from the Ghana Education Service Directors office (2021), in the Effutu Municipality, Winneba indicates that there are 181 Early Childhood teachers teaching in the kindergarten of which 60 are from the government school and 121 are from the private schools. The target population is 181. In this study, the target population is 181 early childhood teachers.

3.7 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample is a portion of the population that is being investigated. A qualitative research study cannot capture an event as it develops, according to Lindolf and Taylor (2002), because it will require a large number of analysts to code and analyse the information gathered. Lindolf and Taylor (2002) went on to say that an effective sampling technique allows researchers to make systematic touch with communication phenomena while wasting as little time as possible. Taherdoost (2016) points out that the sampling technique used in a study might be influenced by the research objectives established by the study itself. Because of the study's research objectives, a purposive sampling technique was used in this study.

Purpose sampling is defined as the selection of sites or participants to assist the researcher in better understanding the problem and the research question under consideration. Purposive sampling, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2013), involves data or people who have been chosen because they possess specific characteristics that are relevant to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling, according to Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoaggwood (2015), is defined as the selection of specific data or subjects that can provide the desired information either because they are the only ones who have it or because they meet the criteria established by the researcher to obtain the information. Purposive sampling techniques are classified into several categories. However, in this study, a homogeneous sampling technique was used. Purposive sampling, according to Creswell (2013), is the selection of venues or individuals that will aid the researcher in understanding the problem and the study question. For this study, the researcher used a purposive sample strategy in accordance with the study's aims.

3.7.1 Homogeneous sampling technique

According to Creswell (2014), homogeneous sampling concentrates, minimizes, simplifies, and facilitates group interviews. In homogeneous sampling, people or sites are included in a study because they share a common trait or qualities (Creswell, 2014). The researcher must establish the attributes of interest and look for people who exhibit those traits in the study using this technique (kusi, 2012). The researcher utilizes a homogeneous sampling strategy to sample trained teachers who have experience with COVID-19 between the years 2020 and 2021 when schools first open. A sample size of 15 was chosen for the study, following Creswell's recommendations. This sample size aid in the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of the study's subject matter. Also, according to Roulston (2010), in

order to do phenomenology research, which tries to examine people's lived experiences, the researcher must find participants who are willing to discuss their own experiences in the phenomenon being studied. Because of this, only teachers who had experience with the phenomenon.

The number of participants in a study is referred to as the sample size. The goal of qualitative research sample size, according to Creswell (2013), is not simply to investigate a small number of sites or individuals, but also to collect substantial information about each site or subject researched. The quality of the study is not determined by the quantity of the sample (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). According to Wolcott (1994), a high sample size is rooted in quantitative research when there is a desire to generalize the findings. Wolcott (1994) further noted that, in qualitative research, a big sample can be detrimental to the results. When the sample size is small, the researcher has the opportunity to capture the distinctive responses and individual interpretations of each participant. As a general rule of thumb, a qualitative sample for a single study that includes individual interviews should be less than 50 participants (Creswell, 2013).

A sample size of fifteen was large enough to sufficiently describe the experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and address the research questions at hand. A large sample size could risk having repetitive data (Vasileiou, Barnett & Thorpe, 2018). The goal of the researcher was to reach data saturation point and this was attained on the 15th respondent hence adding more participants to the study does not result in obtaining additional perspectives or information.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

In the words of Creswell (2013), data collection involves the process of obtaining permits, carrying out a sound qualitative strategy, devising methods for documenting information both on paper and electronically, preserving the data, and anticipating ethical difficulties that may occur. One or more instruments can be used by the researcher to collect data in qualitative research. In qualitative research, there are several methods of data gathering available, including observations, interviews, and documentary filming. In this study, the researcher used interviews as data collection instruments. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) interview is a professional conversation with the goal of getting a participant to talk their experience and to capture their language concepts in the relation topic.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interview

This study used a semi-structured interview guide as the data collection instrument. The semi-structured interview format was recognized as the most appropriate format to use in the early stages of the investigation by Asamoah-Gyimah & Duodu (2007) because it is more adaptable than the structured interview format. The semi-structured interview guide is more adaptable and allows interviewees to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more freely than the structured interview. When appropriate, an interviewer has the chance to go deeper into certain topics of interest and responses provided by respondents (Kuranchie, 2016). One of the objectives of a semi-structured interview guide is to allow the researcher to probe for clarity and in-depth information from the interviewee's responses.

The semi-structured interview guide had four sections, namely (A, B, C and D). Section A asked questions on Early childhood teachers views on COVID-19, Section 'B' asked questions on the 'role of early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Section 'C' asked questions on 'teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Section 'D' asked questions on 'challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic in the centres.

3.8.2 Pre-testing of the semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview guide was pre-tested in five (5) early childhood centres in the Gomoa West District. The essence of the pre-test was to enable the researcher to test the voice recorder to be used for the main interviews as well as to assess whether the interview guide would measure what it is expected to measure. The information obtained from the pre-test served as a guide to the researcher to amend the interview guide to enable her to collect credible data for the actual study.

3.8.3 Trustworthiness criteria

Trustworthiness is defined as the believability of the researcher's findings, that is, all that the researcher has done in designing, carrying out and reporting the research to make the results credible. In qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (2000) for instance, argued that ensuring credibility (internal validity) is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) propose the use of labels such as credibility of data, fittingness and external validity of data, and discernibility and reliability of data for qualitative researches to capture the terms validity and reliability of data.

Anney (2014), departing from the arguments on the use of one label in place of another, suggests that the richness of data; honesty on the part of both the researcher and the participants; appropriate scope of study; extent of triangulation of instruments and methods; suitability of methods; and objectivity of the researcher should be the concern of researchers to ensure the trustworthiness of data and not necessarily the use of one reference term or the other (Anney, 2014).

Commenting on the trustworthiness of qualitative studies, Creswell (2014) proposes eight (8) verification procedures or strategies for testing the validity of qualitative data. These processes include triangulation, member checking to determine accuracy on the parts of the participants, rich and thick descriptions, presenting negative case analysis, spending prolonged time in the field to engage with data, peer debriefing, external auditors, and clarifying research biases. Creswell (2014) however, states that qualitative researchers could adopt at least two of the strategies in their study. In this study an attempt was made at employing five of the verification propositions to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Firstly, I had a prolonged engagement with the data on the research field by visiting the setting of the study on 4 occasions within the period of data collection. During these visits the gathered data was being analysed for persistent observations in recurring similarities and differences in the responses.

Second, there were series of peer reviewing and member-checking activities to increase credibility. This was done by my supervisor as well as academic mentors to verify the validity of the content of their specific data as well as the results of the coding process or analysis. Hence, the audio tapes were checked with my supervisor and academic mentors to seek their interpretations as well and to add validity to my findings.

Third, respondents debriefing was conducted where the transcripts for the data were given to some selected interviewees for authentication of accuracy in their contributions. This was done by playing back the audio recording containing the raw data for participants to listen to determine if their responses have accurately been captured. Copies of typed transcripts were also given to some of the participants to verify accuracy of their responses.

Fourth, to clarify my biases, the questions provided on the interview guides, were self-explanatory, clear and devoid of ambiguity for the respondents to understand with little effort and provide the needed responses.

Fifth, rich and thick descriptions were provided as interpretations on the role of early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID-19, teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic in the centres within the Effutu Municipality.

3.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. According to Creswell (2014), an analysis of the qualitative data is done thematically which indicates a shift from reporting facts to making interpretations of people and activities. The researcher familiarized herself with the data. The interview transcripts were written down, and the most noteworthy details pertaining to the study's research questions were noted. Data were analysed using generated themes to decrease the amount of information. Comments that appeared to belong together were used to group themes. These themes were then used to generate contextually and practically appropriate recommendations in order to

ultimately understand the experiences of teachers' early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.10 Data Collection Procedure

Before the administration of the data collection instruments for this study, an introductory letter was obtained from the office of Early Childhood Education to facilitate the process. Permission was sought from the Office of GES in the Efutu Municipality, headteachers, and all relevant authorities to enable the researcher to collect the data.

In the lead up to the scheduled dates for the interviews, the researcher sent introductory letters and informed consent forms to the institutions and individuals through emails and in-person delivery where applicable. On the day of each interview, the researcher gave a summary of the research and the purpose of the interview. In addition, the researcher reminded the interviewees of their rights to withdraw as outlined in the consent form.

Before interviews, the researcher requested for the signed consent form before proceeding with the interview. The researcher gave the option of oral consent should the respondent want so, but all respondents provided me with signed consent. Each participant was asked to indicate if they wanted to be audio-taped and/or remain anonymous, before the commencement of the interview. The researcher was consequently guided by the response from the interviewees. In addition to this, the researcher kept the interview data safe and secured in a password-protected laptop and pen drive to ensure it did not accidentally fall in the wrong hands. Additionally, each interview lasted 45 to 1 hour, and the researcher scheduled every interview. The participant's schools were used for all of the interviews.

3.11 Ethical Issues

The ethical issues in educational research are those that are concerned with how educational researchers behave themselves or their procedures, as well as the effects of their actions or practices on the individuals who participate in their research (Kusi, 2012 P. 87). According to Halai (2006), "sound research is a moral and ethical activity, and it should be concerned with ensuring that the interests of people participating in a study are not harmed as a result of the research being done" (p.5). Researchers are expected to assess any ethical concerns that arise during research investigations with caution and ethical consideration (Jack & Norman, 2009). As a result, it is critical for the researcher to closely adhere to ethical guidelines when developing both qualitative and quantitative studies. Access, informed consent, Confidentiality, and anonymity are all factors that were explored in this study's ethical considerations.

3.11.1 Access

An introductory letter from the Head, Department of Early Childhood Education of University of Education, Winneba was obtained to enable approval from gate keepers and participants. Thus, a copy of the introductory letter was sent to the headteachers to seek approval for data collection. After permission was granted by the headteachers, dates, time and venue were fixed for data collection.

3.11.2 Informed consent

To seek participants' informed consent, they were furnished with accurate and complete information on the goal(s) and procedures of the investigation so that they fully understood and in turn decided whether to participate in the study or not (Bryman, 2012). Thus, informed consent is a necessary prerequisite to any research in

which human beings are involved as participants. In this study, the researcher clearly spelt out the purpose, the intended use of the data and its significance to the participants. Each of the participants willingly decided to take part in the study.

3.11.3 Confidentiality

According to Bryman (2012), confidentiality “indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner” (p. 67). In keeping with jealously protecting all the pieces of information from the participants so that only the researcher had access to them. Before the commencement of data collection, participants were assured that data would be kept confidentially. In doing so, codes were assigned to the various questionnaires and were kept from the reach of other individuals.

3.11.4 Anonymity

Research participants’ well-being and interests were protected. Participants identified in the study were masked or blinded as far as possible (Speziale & Carpenter, 2011). To ensure anonymity, the responses of respondents were presented in such a way that one could not “identify a given response with a given respondent” (Bryman, 2012, p. 65). Participants were encouraged not to give any identifiable information (such as name of school, participants’ name, email address, house number and contacts) in the interview. Besides, codes (ECT 1, 2, 3, and so on) were assigned to the verbatim transcription of data.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the procedures and the process that were adopted to collect data for this study. The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach and phenomenology as a research plan or design to explore the lived experiences of teachers at the early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic within the

Effutu Municipality. Data collection methods were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Also, the researcher gave rationalization for each data method used. The chapter also has methods of data analysis, ethical issues, and trustworthiness.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

This chapter is devoted to presentation of results and discussions from data collection through semi-structured interviews on the lived experiences of teachers at the early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality. It involved findings from the seventeen informants who experienced COVID-19 at the early childhood centres in the Effutu Municipality. Data were analysed and interpreted using thematic analysis. Themes were thorough analysed and described using viral modernity theory and the literature reviewed in chapter two. For anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms to represent participants. Below are the research questions that underpinned the data collection.

4.1 Analysis Framework

An online qualitative software called Taguette, version 1.3.0, was used to analyse the data. Three research questions which were crafted for this study were used to guide the conduct the interviews. In all the research three questions, the researcher found sixteen themes. To convey the major concerns that emerged from the data, the data were summed up, clarified, and organised into themes and categories (Sub-themes).

After the researcher interviewed the participant, the researcher transcribed the participants' responses from audio to text. Then the researcher conducted member checking by giving the data transcript to the participants to check the transcript text included the whole point exactly similar to the response in the interview session. The researcher sent the transcript via email and noticed the participants after delivering the

transcript. The participants had different times to check the transcript and gave feedback. All the participants noticed the researcher after checking the transcript. None of the participants found issues with the transcript hence no changes were made to the text.

After the member check, the researcher coded the transcripts, in open coding, the researcher divided the transcript into some categories. The categories were performed on a line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph, or sentence-by-sentence. The text was marked and got a label (coding) that the researcher created to be something relevant to the data. It was easier for the researcher to find out the point of the text.

Then, the researcher performed axial coding. Axial coding was the step to give a code for a similar meaning of the text. Axial coding was used to categorize the similar meaning of the text to some of the subcategories and to make the subgroup into one category. After that, the researcher could find the result of the study and present the result of the study. Table 1 displays the themes along with their accompanying research questions.

Table 1: Themes for the study

Research Questions	Main Themes	Sub-themes
What the views of Early childhood teachers on COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality	Early childhood teachers views on Covid-19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Views on Covid-19 2. Awareness 3. Protecting self and others
What role do early childhood teachers played in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality?	Early Childhood teachers' role during covid-19 pandemic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensuring social distancing 2. cleaning and disinfection of learning environment 3. Encouraging sick children to stay home
What teaching strategies did early childhood teachers employ in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu 'Municipality?	Strategies early childhood teachers employed during covid-19 pandemic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implications 2. Delivery methods used 3. informed teaching method used 4. Online modules and technology used 5. Individual play
What challenges did early childhood teachers encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early childhood centres in the Effutu Municipality?	Challenges early childhood teachers encounter during	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inadequate Resources 2. Stress 3. Risk of Contracting COVID-19 4. Learners' social skill 5. Income discrepancies 6. Quarantine space

4.2 Bio Data of Respondents

The researcher interviewed fifteen participants to conduct this study. The participants were aged between 23 and 53 years. All the participants were female early childhood teachers. No male teacher was identified at the early childhood classroom. This indicated that the study's findings were influenced by the views of female early childhood teachers. Since no comparison was made with respect to male and female teachers, the outcome did not affect the study since the questions were not gender-specific.

The personal information also showed that the participants who were interviewed indicated various ranks. one participant was ranked Superintendent I, three of the participants were ranked as Superintendent II, four of the participants were ranked as Senior Superintendent II, seven of the participants were ranked as Senior Superintendent I, four of the participants were ranked Principal Superintendent, while one of them was ranked Assistant Director II. Their academic and professional qualifications were Diploma and Degree in Early Childhood Education and Basic Education, while their length of service spanned from 4-27 years. The responses showed that five of the participants had served between 4 and 5 years. three of the participants had served between 6 and 10 years. two of the participants had served between 11 and 15 years while three of them had served between 16 and 20 years. the remaining four participants had served more than 20 years. For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, the identities of the participants are undisclosed. instead, information attributed to them was identified with pseudonyms derived from them during the interviews.

3.3 Research Question One

What are the views of early childhood teachers on COVID-19 pandemic?

The first research question sort to explore the views of early childhood teachers on COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality. The study identified that teachers in the Effutu Municipality have knowledge on the COVID-19. These were derived from research question one:

- View on Covid-19
- Awareness
- Protecting self and others

3.3.1 Views on COVID-19

The interviewees revealed that they have knowledge on the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers who are participants in this study mentioned that they have positive and negative views on the Covid-19 pandemic. A participant mentioned that:

Covid-19 is a very dangerous disease that is able to spread as fast as it can because it is through contact and other things. An in fact when it came in to existence we were all scared of losing or life's (EcTr 1).

Another early childhood teacher expressed that:

Covid-19 was a virus that in fact we all got worried when we heard that the covid-19 is in Ghana. We were all worried because how these kids are, when they are playing they don't know there is any thing like that. They were not thinking about like how is going to worry them and staff (EcTr 4).

EcTr 05 also mentioned that:

I learnt about it. And the preventive measures that we have to take when we are in school for our learners. So, we make sure when children are in school, they are in their nose mask, they wash their hands regularly and use their hand sanitizers to rub their hands.

EcTr 06 also affirmed that:

I can say covid-19 is a disease that came in the year 2019, it's a virus. It came March there going. It affected as heavily because schools were closed, works were closed down and in fact many things weren't done.

According to ECTr 07:

I will say that Covid 19 is have both negative and positive sides... yea...eerrm... I will talk about the negative side first. the negative side brought in a situation where some jobs and companies have to lay off some workers or employees due to the crowdedness in the work place. some companies employed a lot of people but due to the covid 19 where distancing had to be there, they had to lay some of them out so people lost their jobs and even some people could not travel outside the country; it brought a lot of negative things. teachers lost their jobs, they couldn't get paid well, especially the private schools, because the children weren't in school, they were not paying school fees hence teachers could not be paid. but the positive aspect came to the rise when those selling nose mask, hand sanitisers, face mask, their market grows up because people had to protect themselves always with these kind of things so as for them, they benefited from the covid 19. some people too have to open businesses based on that, for retail services for nose mask and a whole lot of things. I for instance being a teacher... eerm.. because I wasn't going to school anymore, I had to just look for another business, so at my area I was doing a little breakfast business when people will come and eat for me to also get some little income; so it's of negative and positive aspect.

Another Early childhood teacher revealed that:

Covid-19 brought a new form of teaching. It was something that came which we were all not prepared for it but we went home and we came back still it was still there but everything went on well. We came back to school to move on with our academic work (EcTr 08).

A teacher mentioned that:

covid 19 wasn't a good name to the country because it didn't bring anything to us. it slowed the economy and everything wasn't growing, a lot of people lost their jobs and we the teachers had to go home and we the private teachers, we are not been paid like the government teachers who were home and they were paid. we had to do online things so that we can get small small income. we went totally lock down and we were not aware of these things, we just shut everything down and we had to stay home(EcTr 10).

Correspondingly, a teacher added that:

Well, mine view on COVID-19 is is it has instigated a global pandemic. And wide spread of it led to the cancellation of schools and most of the institutions in the country and also it caused a lot of death. A lot of people died during the pandemic and also it interrupted the economic state of most of the countries and then it also overwhelmed our health care systems since a lot of people are dying you know a lot of people must be taken to the hospital for them to do regular check-ups, test and all that. So, it overwhelmed our health care systems. So, I think that's my view on COVID-19 (EcTr 11).

The responses from that the participants indicated they are having a deep knowledge on Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic has both negative and positive impact on early childhood Education. Teachers mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has made them very conscious about themselves in the school environment.

- **Awareness**

Spreading the awareness of COVID-19 is the second theme derived from research question one. Early childhood teachers made sure learners at the early childhood centres know much about the Covid-19 how it spreads and the safety measures they had to put in place to prevent learners from contracting the COVID-19 pandemic. Ian

the study teachers mentioned how they spread the awareness of the COVID-19 and is as follows:

In the school environment I was always on my kids to put on the nose mask. You know when they go home, they will not provide the nose mask themselves their parents will provide for them. So, as I tell them to wear their nose mask every day is a form of educating and spreading how to prevent the covid-19. Also, I was spreading the awareness to teachers and other parents as well (EcTr 02).

A teacher expressed that:

We always talk about it in the morning, at assembly and after closing. We always tell them how the virus is spreading and how we should protect ourselves from not getting the virus or into the trouble (EcTr 03).

Another teacher explained that:

We spread it through wall chats, we made some chats on the disease and we pasted it on the walls. We also told the learners to watch television on the covid-19. We also told them to listen to news about the covid-19 (EcTr 05).

Also, it was altered by a teacher that:

hmmm... I remember back then... the school wrote 'no nose mask no entry', without you having nose mask you cannot enter the school so for instance the parents, before the pandemic they use to come to the school, stand at the gate and pick up their children but because the pandemic was at rise they couldn't come inside the school, they were always at the back of the gate waiting for their wards to be brought to them because we might not know what you are bring inside so we were always telling them to put on their nose mask, sanitise their hands, wash the children hands frequently to prevent the pandemic from spreading. Again, we were always talking to the children about it... social distancing... I remember the children were even making fun of it because initially they didn't understand some of the things about covid 19. they didn't know what it really was but when we told them about social distancing then they will be making fun like ...eiii social distancing... because they feel that they were too close initially so why all of a sudden, we are using the term social distancing so we spoke to them about it frequently like there is a kind of sickness that is up and if you don't take care you might end up dying and you will leave mummy and daddy so they shouldn't be too close to their friends. then we talk

to the parents... because some parents have more than two children, they also have to know how to engage them in the house because we will be trying our best in the school but when they get to the house, they will be like... eerm... it is my family so why am I also doing social distancing with my family members. so, it's all about talking and communication (EcTr 09).

EcTr 12 mentioned that:

So, one major thing we did was we dedicated at our assembly and we talked about covid-19. Then we also print pictures and pasted in the classroom for them to see some of the covid-19 ways to go about washing our hands and then we had role play on that especially on Friday. We also had pictures showing someone coughing and covering his or her mouth. So, we did all this to spread the awareness(EcTr 12).

It was mentioned by EcTr 13 that:

Spreading the awareness you know it wasn't easy some people didn't believe that the COVID-19 is a reality they all thought it was something that was cooked from whether the Chinese or whatever but I still spread the awareness by telling people that the COVID is real. I my brother happened to work at a facility so whenever he comes home, he tells me that you know the COVID is real so you have to protect yourself. So, since he experienced it and he told me I also realise that no the COVID is real. Its not something we have to joke about it so the experience that my brother told me you know it sort of inspired me to spread the awareness that OVID is real. So you have to put on your nose mask. You ensure the two metres interval and all that, sanitizing your hands at regular intervals (EcTr 13).

The respondents that spreading the awareness of the Covid-19 was very key to them at the early childhood centres. They made sure that they used different methods and strategies to spread the awareness of the COVID-19 in the early childhood centres.

Protecting self and others

The responses of the interviewees indicated that they played a considerable amount of role in protecting themselves and their learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to take precautions for both themselves and the students. One of the participants said:

In the school environment whenever I am coming to school, I have to put on my face masks because I am handling children. So, I have a face mask and whenever I get to the compound, I make sure that you wash your hands with soap and water and sanitize them before I even let you get into the classroom. I always have to check your temperature before you enter the school and when you are going home, I will just take your temperature before you leave the school. Doing all these, I believe am protecting myself and the children from contracting the COVID-19 pandemic (ECTr 02).

Contributing to the roles early childhood teachers played in protecting themselves and the children during the COVID-19 pandemic, ECTr 13 indicated:

So, the COVID-19 because we are all aware, every morning I tell them about the disease, the new era that we are in that is the COVID-19. So, I make sure all my colleagues put on their nose masks and then sanitise their hands and we weren't coming closer. But because of COVID-19 we usually wave and wash our hands regularly and we put on our nose masks. So, when I am teaching, I wear my nose mask and the learners too. One of the early morning activities was to check whether they are wearing their nose mask and also wash their hands then use their hand sanitizer to sanitize their hands. It was done in the morning, the afternoon which is break and closing time. So, when we are doing work, I go round and give them the sanitizer for them to sanitize their hand. Since I did this together with other colleague teachers, we are all safe and no one has contracted the virus (ECTr 13).

Affirming the roles Early childhood teachers played, ECTr 15 said:

We were all advised on how the virus is, and how dangerous that virus is so we ask the children to be protected by wearing their nose mask. We were provided with some from the Education office so I gave it out to learners and we were having veronica buckets that we always have water in it with their tissue and their sanitizers. So, after break I make sure every learner washes their hands and sanitizes. Teachers were also given advice too (ECTr 15).

Another teacher also added:

Initially, when COVID-19 came to Ghana, schools were closed down. And when school schools resumed, we've protected ourselves by abiding by the safety protocols which are wearing nose mask, washing of our hands and sanitizing or hands (ECTr 12).

Correspondingly, ECTr 11 mentioned:

I was protecting others and I ensure the learners also follow the safety protocols. I also told the learners to watch television about the COVID-19. I also told them to listen to news on the COVID-19. This has helped in not recording COVID-19 cases in our school (ECTr 11).

The views expressed by the early childhood teachers indicate that they played a very important role in ensuring that the children entrusted under their care are protected against the Covid1-19 pandemic. Again, it is evident that they were concerned with their own safety as well other stakeholders who visit their school hence putting in measures to ensure safety.

4.4 Research Question Two

What role did early childhood teachers play in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID-19 within the Effutu Municipality?

The first research question sought to explore the role early childhood teachers played in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during COVID-19. The study identified several roles played by early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment. The themes that emerged from the transcribed data include:

- Establishing Protocols
- Ensuring social distancing;
- Cleaning and disinfection of learning environment;
- Encouraging sick children to stay home

4.4.1 Establishing COVID-19 protocols

Another theme that emerged from research question one was the roles early childhood teachers played in establishing COVID-19 protocols. All the interviewees noted to

have played roles in establishing COVID-19 protocols within the school environment to ensure safety. Stating the roles they played, an early childhood teacher mentioned that:

In our classrooms, our tables and chairs are in a round form so I have 6 on a table but due to the pandemic, it has to be 3 on a table so that I won't have a lot of more group work and other because of the pandemic. For washing hands, I made a daily routine, from class, the child goes to the veronica bucket, wash the hands, wipe it with a tissue, come to the table and I check your temperature, and from there the child goes to the class. The little ones weren't used to the nose mask because of their breathing aspect. we were always sanitizing things, the playing objects and other things, always mobbing the classroom and other things (ECTr 09).

In addition to this, another participant remarked this way:

with the whole school, whenever you get to the school compound, you had to wear your nose mask and at least also have one in your bag so in case the one you have falls down or it gets dirty, you just have to take it off and use the other one. but the little ones couldn't so they had to go with the washing of hands and even sanitizing their hands was something, at end of the day you will see somebody putting their hands in the mouth and even the sanitizer itself is something else so it wasn't easy. some of the children will bring it but will just pull it down, they couldn't wear it for that long period. it was we teachers who managed to wear it till closing but the children weren't used to the mask because it was a new thing. they will bring it alright; somebody will just wear it small, get tired, take it out and put it on the table and somebody else will touch it and you have to just take it and throw it away (ECTr 04).

To corroborate this statement, a participant also expressed her views as follows:

The measures I will say they were taught, in fact, one thing I didn't encourage was group or sharing of things. One of the measures too that I made the learners to bring their own pencils because at the KG class we keep the pencil on the table for them to remove or to share erasers or crayons. But during that time one the measure was I had to let them understand the situation, so I made each one to have his or pencil, her eraser, her crayons, so that there will not be any sharing. And also, another measure was to ensure that when they come out or when they come out to eat strict hygiene. I will make sure they wash their hands, wear the face mask, they will observe the protocols. And also, one of the measures was to check them when they come to school in the morning. I will check them and find out whether they have temperature or something. So, that I will help them before the lesson start (ECTr 15).

In support of ECTr 15, ECTr 07 also said that:

I kept reminding them of what not to do. Not to share their personal things like I was asking them or inspecting them. Inspecting their water bottles, their cutleries bowls and other things that I made sure everybody brought something that they were using personally for their school feeding. So, they use their own things. They were not sharing pencils, erasers, crayon nothing. They were not sharing anything and then I make sure that some of them do spite around. So, I was reminding them not to and even if that happens, I had to clean them. Yes, at the close of the week, we clean the whole class. We scrub (ECTr 07).

Affirming the views expressed, ECTr 13 indicated that:

We have hand washing buckets which is also called the Veronica bucket with water in them, we had our liquid soap and we were provided with the tissue napkins. So that one if they wash their hands and they clean with it they dispose it unlike using the napkins and the handkerchiefs and clean their hands and keep them in their pockets. What I did was that I made it routine that we do every morning, afternoon and closing. When they are coming from the home, they will definitely touch something on their way before they come to school. They will even hold the hand of their siblings. In the class I made sure learners sanitize their hands in about ten and twenty minutes. I also made sure our head mistress provided poly tank with water in them. So, the accessibility to water wasn't a problem for us. We were having running water for them to wash their hands every morning (ECTr 13).

Similarly, some early childhood teachers employed some motivations to establish the protocols. For instance, ECTr 04 expressed that:

What I did was that to motivate any anyone who did put on the nose mask throughout the day. So, such as giving them pencils, erasers, and sharpener. So, what I also did was that some of the children do come with old nose mask. So, when they come with old ones, I try to get them new ones as well, which wasn't easy for me as a teacher. I really spent my money during the COVID-19 (ECTr 04).

In addition to these, another participant stated that:

What I did was that, I told the parents to put nose mask in their kids bags and then put one on when they are coming to school. So, when they enter the school with the nose mask. Before they will go home, they will take that one of and put it the bin. And later in the day they will put on the second one and send it to the house (ECTr 10).

The quotations from the early childhood teachers showed that they had significant role in establishing protocols in establishing COVID-19 protocols. particularly, they ensured that the children wore their nose masks throughout the school hours. The responses also indicate that early childhood teachers encourage the children to wash and sanitize their hands regularly, which is among the protocols established by World Health Organisation and Ghana Health Service. Again, some of the teachers employed motivational packages such as giving pencils, erasers, and sharpeners to learners who wore their nose masks throughout the entire school hours without removing and dropping them to their jaws. Also, parents were encouraged by early childhood teachers to ensure their wards have nose masks before reporting to school.

4.4.2 Ensuring social distancing

The third theme that emerged in relation to first research question was the role early childhood teachers played in ensuring social distancing. The respondents in this considered social distancing as a necessary intervention to ensure safety hence establishing it among the learners. For example, ECTr 04 emphasized this view, citing her personal example:

My classroom is very small but I managed. Most of the activities in the classroom was brought outside so that we could distance ourselves from one another. So that children will not have a close contact with one another. So, I had most of our classrooms in the open space (ECTr 04).

Another participant noted :

For social distancing usually, I will tell my children they should spread out their hands. Ensuring the social distancing I was telling my children that should spread out their hands. They should make sure their hands don't touch anybody. So, with that, we kept the distance (ECTr 06).

One respondent also pointed out that:

Yes, I quite remember one boy telling me that teacher I want to play with my friend and I told him that because of the pandemic if you play with your friend and you get in touch with him and the person is having the disease. He will be also affected with it. So, I placed items in the classroom for them to play with it. Sometimes I take of all the chairs and tables. And then you will see them sitting at one corner doing their own thing (ECTr 10).

Another participant indicated that:

Children and social distancing hmm. We role played on the social distancing. As their teacher I told them not to be holding their friends. You need to guide them. So, you will tell them they will forget but I practiced with them every day. The children themselves are were reporting to me that some of the children are touching their friends. So, they themselves were doing the security for us. In the beginning it was very difficult for us but they came to the realization that there is something going on that is why we are telling them what they should do, for example social distancing (ECTr 13).

Similarly, an early childhood teacher shared her role by stating:

In fact, ensuring the social distancing was challenging but I was encouraging them, motivating them and talking to them not to play together and also get in touch with their friends. I have to do more of the talking. If I don't hug you, if I don't shake your hand, it doesn't mean I don't like you. Is the situation we find ourselves. The Covid has made us to follow a protocol. it's not forever. And that was because people were dying and they have seen some of them. So, they were all witnesses to the situation. When you switch on the Tv you will see Covid people dying. When you are in the house you hear someone has gotten this, so the situation made us to tell them that is not permanent. Is a situation that has come and the disease if we fellow the protocols it will go. So, we encourage them (ECTr 07).

ECTr 01 also added that:

For social distancing usually, I will tell my children they should spread out their hands. Ensuring the social distancing I was telling my kids sorry my children that should spread out their hands. They should make sure their hands don't touch anybody. So, with that we kept the distance (ECTr 01).

A participant mentioned that though it was challenging establishing social distancing among the learners but they did their best to ensure safety: She responded this way:

because of this pandemic, a lot of activities couldn't go on in the school, like assemblies and other things because you might try to social distance them but still these children will end up coming to the classroom, I tried my best, if you are sitting on a table, I just reduced it to 3 so there will be spaces in between them. if you are moving to a friend to go and play, you just have to talk to the child and tell them that you can't go to this place, it's like you are been limited. due to the pandemic, we were limited to a lot of a things, you can't even play, you can't talk too much, you can't even yawn freely, it really was something but with my learners I tried (ECTr 02).

Another participant remarked this way:

it wasn't easy because you can't tell a child who is two years not to get close to his friends but the only thing that I did that I told them they shouldn't put their hands on their friend's neck. And they were sitting apart from each other. The problem was that we just couldn't just tell them that they shouldn't play with them. sometimes when they get close, I get there and put them apart so that they don't get too much close so it's not like we were preventing them from playing but I just like telling them that you can play with your friend but not too much and not too long. (ECTr 03).

Whereas some respondents agreed to have played roles and shared some of the roles they played in establishing social distancing, hence ensuring safety; other early childhood teachers believed that establishing social distancing among children is impossible, hence they could not maintain social distancing among the children. A participant mentioned that:

Social distancing was difficult at the KG level because we were sitting in circles. I mean round tables, that is how we sit at the KG and our number too didn't allow us to observe the social distancing but we tried to deal with the number that came each day. So, for my class there are sixty-two children but every day and its attendance. So, I dealt with the number as in when they came to school. So, maybe a day I have sixty children or maybe fifty-five children, I will make sure maybe I have ten on a table so that they will not be too crowded. So that is how I did the social distancing but it wasn't effective as it supposed to be. The tables were not far from each other but they sat on a round table though, not observing the social distancing to one

another. We tried but it wasn't successful. It was God who saved us. (ECTr 07).

Affirming the comment made by ECTr 07, ECTr 14 indicated that:

The only thing I could say is that the children should not get too close to another child. But you know these children, they will be doing their own things. The moment I say it, you will see them coming together so it was very difficult establishing social distancing. The classroom is also too small and we didn't have enough space to ensure they are sitting far from each other (ECTr 14).

The comments from the respondents indicated that they were maintaining social distancing among learners in early childhood centres in the Effutu Municipality. This contributed in reducing opportunities for the COVID-19 disease transmission. In their events and daily routines, large group activities were reduced to slow down the outbreak in order to reduce the chance of infection among the children.

4.4.3 Cleaning and disinfecting learning environments

The fourth theme that emerged in relation to the first research question was the role early childhood teachers played in cleaning and disinfecting the learning environment. The respondent understood that the virus that causes COVID-19 can land on surfaces and stay for several hours. They also understood the possibility for people to become infected if they touch those surfaces and then touch their nose, mouth, or eyes hence there was the need to clean and disinfect the learning environment to ensure safety. A respondent expressed the role she played this way:

Yes, as for this school, every morning because the class is very small is not spacious. During early morning activities because of how KG teaching is done. Normally the chairs are arranged for circle time. And before we do that you sweep the class of course and you dust the chairs before you arrange it. After that you have to dust the tables too and arrange for table top activities. And of course, you have arranged your centres, the learning corners and dust all those things and clean all the toys and everything. You don't do it with sanitizer but you make sure the dust and other maybe water and soap or something you clean

it. Make sure the place is fine. If there are books that are not arranged, you arrange them well and clean the surfaces (ECTr 07).

In the same vein, another early childhood teacher remarked:

I was scrubbing the place with Dettol but it was not every day. Before school reopen, I used the Dettol to scrub and then every two weeks or a month or as at when is needed because the place is not cemented. The place is very rough, so if you want to scrub there's no water in the school compound. We go to other neighboring places for water. That's why I was saying that we used the Dettol as and when I needed it. And the disinfectant, we were disinfecting their pencils and then the sanitizer too we were using it. We used the sanitizer to disinfect the chairs and other things. But the scrubbing of the floor wasn't done regularly but for their washrooms yes. We used the sanitiser. For their veronica bucket we use the sanitiser to wash and clean some of these things. But not the floor, the floor is very rough and if you want to use water unless you use about plenty buckets of water (ECTr 15).

Another teacher mentioned:

Yes, I do put sanitiser and any of the disinfectants. I usually use Dettol. So put once in a while I will just sprinkle and then you clean, because you know they are kids and then they pick germs easily. And I ensure washing of hands also. In fact, one thing I also did was encouraging them to get local spices. Yea told them to tell their mothers to put just one or two. I don't know whether is its acceptable or not. Looking at it I know locally they are antibiotics (ECTr 07).

ECTr 10 stated that:

Yes, I did. A mixture of parazone and Dettol was given. They will clean their tables wash their hands after eating, they will do the same thing. After school when we finish sweeping the classroom, we all come together to mop the class (ECTr 10).

Another respondent noted that:

So, the materials that are concrete materials like their learning blocks, bottle tops and even their pencils were always disinfected because I know how the COVID-19 is and how it spreads. I make sure that they clean their objects they bring to school. Also, I assisted them to clean their tables and the floor (ECTr 13).

ECTr 02 narrated the following:

Yes they did that regularly, especially on Fridays when we were going on the weekend. before we leave the school compound, they will come

and fumigate the school, the classroom and the compound, then we leave, then on Monday we come and do a little cleanup before the children come in (ECTr 02).

She further noted that:

for the learners, they can't always do things themselves so I had to always be doing all of these things for them but I did it frequently, immediately they finished using the objects. I made sure that we clean everything and put them back at where we took it and we did the same thing before giving it to them. we were doing every day on regular basis (ECTr 02).

The responses of the interviewees suggest that they employed ways in cleaning and disinfecting the learning environment. Cleaning with products containing soap or detergent reduces germs on surfaces by removing contaminants and decreases the risk of infection from surfaces. This role, they believe helped to ensure a safe environment for learning amid COVID 19 pandemic.

4.4.4 Encouraging sick children to stay home

The fifth theme derived from the first research question was that early childhood teachers prioritized safety, accordingly encouraging children to stay home when they were sick without knowing the cause of the sickness. One of the respondents remarked:

I discourage sick children from coming to school. Because when they come to school sick, they will not be active in class. They will not be active and happy because I will try and isolate them. They will sit somewhere else. And then I will educate the parents to let their kid stay at home. So, they even didn't try to come (ECTr 04).

ECTr 12 stated that:

Depending on the sickness, I did encourage some of them because they have difficulty. They wanted to come to school because of how they will be meeting teachers and other friends but the situation didn't allow them. So, encouraged them that they should stay at home. So, they should gain their health before they come to school. Because looking at a child suffering to breathe, when he or she want to come but we encourage them don't worry, I will still bring your homework.

Your mother will come for your homework for you to do at home. So, I encourage the very sick ones to stay at home. If it's not severe, you don't have a temperature high, I encourage you to come. Because some of them decide to stay in their house intentionally, nothing was wrong with them but they will just say they won't come to school. So, such a child you have to encourage them. (ECTr 12).

Another respondent noted that:

Oh yea, because there is no need for you to come to school especially when you are sick. There is a need for you to stay to recover fully before you come to school. So, Perfect punctuality was discouraged. So perfect awards were stopped. I explained to them that this is the situation we are facing and they understood it. So, there was nothing like the best punctuality (ECTr 07).

In support of ECTr 07, ECTr 05 also said that:

In the sense that prior to COVID-19 teachers were giving children awards. Like when a child comes to school regularly, you use to give the awards that well done Kojo, and even in the classroom if a child is able to answer questions an award. If not even award an appraisal or something. So, if a child is sick the child wants to come to school because he or she knows that when she comes to school madam will give me an award because I am coming to school. (ECTr 07).

Data from respondents showed that they urged the learners to stay at home when ill or showed symptoms of illness. Other teachers mentioned that they called the parents of the learners who arrived at school sicked and ask them to pick them up. Teachers also mentioned that they informed parents of the new disease, known as COVID-19, and its transmission methods. Therefore, they advised learners to stay at home if they are ill.

4.5 Research Question Three

What teaching strategies did teachers employed in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality?

The second research question examined the teaching strategies early childhood teachers employ in teaching during the Covid 19. The study reviewed some teaching

strategies teachers used or put into practice while teaching during the Covid 19 at the early centres. The following themes reflect the strategies used in teaching during the Covid 19:

- Implication of COVID-19
- Methods employed in teaching
- Informed method used
- Online modules and technology used
- Individual play

4.5.1 Implications of COVID-19

The first theme from research question two is Implications. During the COVID-19 teachers revealed that the pandemic effected teaching methods used in the early childhood centres. The participants in the study talked about how COVID-19 affected teaching methods in early childhood centres. A participant indicated that:

it has really affected because first, if you are teaching topics like living and non-living things or special places in the community, you have to visit the hospital and that but because of COVID they don't allow the children to come to the hospital and places like that because they can easily contact the disease (ECTr 03).

Also, ECTr 06 noted that:

yes, COVID-19 has really affected teaching methods that we used for instance when you are using a method like dramatization. You know they interact; they touch, they are in contact. So, during the COVID pandemic, you know some of these methods, you have to do away with them just to prevent the spread of the COVID pandemic. So, the COVID-19 affected the learner centered way of teaching. Because we all know that for the learner centered, it's solely the child who does everything and you us a teacher you become a facilitator, you just facilitate the learning. And in this case where there was COVID-19 or where we were in the pandemic, we couldn't do it because you know the child centered approach of learning involves participation for all the learners and you know contact physical contact too will be very high. So, it discouraged the learner centered approach to teaching. So,

it became sort of teacher centered but not really teacher. We were just in-between the lines (ECTr 06).

In addition, ECTr 10 also stated that:

Yes, you know early childhood centres we are encouraged to do play activities, play based activities, and child centered. Now even if the child is coming to pick something you are afraid. So, what I did was, I used different methods of approach in teaching kids. Role plays too I discouraged it because somebody has to come and dramatize it for somebody to see it. And it is not only one person who is going to do that, it involves children and when they come definitely, they have to do some handshaking somewhere so everything was shuttered. All field trips were stopped. We stopped everything so no field trip was encouraged. we even went out stepping out of the classroom just to play, it affected it. Because now the playing involves two or more people so how can we play without our friend? So, all we did was indoors. If we come out, we will just come out maybe take fresh air and then go back to the classroom. So, during the pandemic it was not child centered again, it became teacher centered because teacher has to do everything for the child to know of it (ECTr 10).

In support of ECTr 10, ECTr 13 reviewed that:

Yes, the covid really affected our teaching methods. Because the KG most of our activities we do them in groups. There is something called COVID-19 and they are supposed to abide by the rules so sometimes an activity is supposed to be done in a group way but you will change the method of that activity. Like I can change from group method to a discussion method. So, now is the whole class discussing not small group discussing. Gone are the days when the group members will also do their own thing. But because of the COVID-19, I need to change the method and adopt a different method. When we role play, we understand the topic very well but because of the COVID-19 we don't do it anymore. Before COVID-19 we will be dancing and touching ourselves but because of the COVID-19, we couldn't now touch ourselves. So, we need to change from role play, and dramatization all those methods of teaching. What I did was that I find a new method that will find a new method suit the lesson. In even demonstration method they will touch items of people, like when we do the think-pair-share, they will think and then they will share with their friends and you are telling them to do social distancing. So, they will share but they have to move one meter apart before they talk (ECTr 13).

Another respondent also said that:

It even affected teaching and learning itself. Aside from the materials, and the roles that we used, the teaching and learning itself was affected. Children became so redundant and they were not able to

come up with ideas and other things. It made teaching a bit difficult (ECTr 14).

Respondent ECTr 07 articulated that:

Yes, it did. We were not allowed to go anywhere only the classroom. We were strictly told that we will not go outside the school compound or school premises. Even in the class children were not even going for break. You do your break in class. Only going to the washroom that you will be allowed to go outside. It affected some of them like coming out to play. But it really affected us. You know children like to play a lot, especially the KG children. So, if you just say they won't go out for a break is like punishment. So, some of them when the sun comes out, they say the whole day they haven't gone outside. We were doing tablet and learning centres. No outside play (ECTr 07).

ECTr 09 also narrated:

You know these children they learn through play, so sometimes you may not be sure of what you are bringing, like the Teaching Learning Material the source. You may not be sure of the hands that it has touched through. Like manipulating objects or having a real feeling of whatever you doing. Sometimes you have to be careful because I am touching it, maybe another person has held it but for a third one to come in it wasn't safe. So, it affected that aspect of teaching. You know sometimes they may have to hold their hands and do certain activities together but because of that they couldn't, you know holding their hands brings that form of bond between them but so that friendship, that bond as a class or having that sense of brotherhood was somehow affected (ECTr 09).

The replies from the early childhood educators showed that COVID-19 had an impact on the instructional methods utilized in early childhood facilities. The COVID-19 discouraged the use of teaching strategies including role-playing, dramatization, group method, and field trip. On account of COVID-19, play-based activities were also discouraged. The early childhood centre found it challenging to educate and learn as a result.

4.5.2 Teaching methods used

The second theme from research question two is teaching methods used during COVID-19. From the responses of the participants, they made it known that due to the

nature of the COVID-19, some teaching methods were used and others weren't used.

A respondent articulated that:

I only used individual kind of methods. you have to teach individuals and small groups. The small groups where I said that our tables are made up of 6 children but due to the covid 19 it has been reduced to 3 children. we also used some kind of demonstration, we the teachers had to demonstrate everything, sometimes the children love videos so you just get some from online and you just show it to them (ECTr 02).

Also, ECTr 04 also pointed out that:

Individual based activity was what I was using to teach. I also used demonstration during the pandemic. Because you can't let children be in groups to have an activity. So, as a teacher, I also used the demonstration method (ECTr 04).

In the same view as ECTr 04, ECTr 02 identified that:

I used individual teaching. It is like when you are teaching and you call them and they do it individually, it not as first that they will be in smaller groups for you to teach them.

In addition, another participant also expressed that:

I was using more of the discussion method and the whole class teaching. That's my method and I was using more pictures and I was demonstrating it to them. Then during sound or literacy, I was using more of the audio and TLM. So, they will listen and I will demonstrate to them. Because if you mean to tell them that they should go outside and experience or listen to, they will not allow you to go outside or they will be crowded. So, I wasn't going outside for a sound walk (ECTr 07).

ECTr 13 also identified that:

Personally, I was using the discussion method, the question-and-answer method. Sometimes I will look for videos display for them to watch. Those ones do not involve physical contact. You are just there and you will watch.

ECTr 14 articulated that:

Because of the nature of the disease, I was using the individualized method. Teaching and learning became more teacher centered as compared prior to the COVID-19. Though initially, it was a bit child

centered we are doing it but we don't delve much as before covid (ECTr 14).

A respondent also affirmed that:

That's what I was saying that I just used the table and will just space out. If they should have been ten on a table, I will just use five instead of ten. So, I will just use five and keep the rest somewhere for another table. I used discussion methods often during the COVID-19.

The above respondents' responses suggested that due to the way the COVID-19 pandemic spread, certain teaching methods were implemented in the early childhood centres. The interviewees revealed discussion approach and the demonstration method were used in teaching at the early childhood centres during COVID-19. They choose discussion and demonstration since they prevent interactivity. Additionally, participants picked these methods above others like the group method, role play, dramatization, and field trip because they made it easier for them to follow the COVID-19 guidelines. Additionally, interviewees mentioned that learning and instruction at early childhood centres tended to be more teacher-centered than child-centered.

4.5.3 Informed teaching method used

What influenced the teaching methods utilised at the early childhood center during COVID-19 is the third issue that emerged from research the question two. Teachers admitted that they used specific teaching strategies in their lessons, and they did so for the following reasons:

ECTr 14 pointed out that:

you know when you go to a place and you are not family to the rules and regulations you become very difficult. So, what I did was now everything has changed so I also have to change my style of for the betterment of the kids (ECTr 14).

A participant mentioned that:

It was because of the Covid that why I was using that method (ECTr 11)

ECTr also discussed that;

Because that is the method I saw best, I couldn't go for field trip, I couldn't go for dramatization, role play and other things so looking at the situation at hand, that was the method it will be good for learning (ECTr 02).

ECTr 13 also mentioned that:

I choose those methods because those ones do not involve physical contact. You are just there and you will watch (ECTr 13).

A respondent also said that:

We all know that the COVID-19 spread through physical contact with infected people so with this well watching a video lesson, you know we were not over crowded. We sat individually; I was making sure that you are not touching anybody. So, you just sit quietly as you watch the video, you know it didn't involve touching. You know it didn't involve touching each other. So, I saw it as it as one of the best ways or one of the best methods I can use in my teaching, just to prevent the spread of the Covid (ECTr 06)

Also, a participant discussed that:

The Covid, because when you go outside definitely the children will be crowded and the COVID-19 didn't encourage us being crowded (ECTr 07).

ECTr 10 also stated that:

You know when you go to a place and you are not family to the rules and regulations you become very difficult. So, what I did was know everything has changed so I also have to change my style of for the betterment of the kids (ECTr 10).

The third theme presented data on what influence early childhood teachers in choosing the teaching methods they chose to deliver content during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this theme participants noted that they choose those approaches because they didn't want the learners to be overcrowded. The fact that those

techniques don't entail physical contact was cited by a few other teachers as a reason for their choice. Other early childhood teachers explained how circumstances had changed and how they, too, had to modify their teaching strategies.

4.5.4 Online modules and technology used

The fourth theme developed from research question two is the usage of online modules and technology used. Due to time constraints in the classroom, the respondents disclosed that certain online modules were used during the COVID-19. A participant said the following:

we used WhatsApp. we did the videos and send it to the parents. we were using only WhatsApp (ECTr 03).

Another participant affirmed that:

We used phone calls. Because most of the parents in my classroom, the children their parents most of them do not have access to WhatsApp phones. Most of them don't have phones but I was calling them, that tomorrow when you are coming to school, please bring the this that that. Maybe we will be using the box, or line, or reading about something, or learning how to write three. Tomorrow the lesson is on three. If you are not able to come to school, I call you and tell you to practice three in the house. So, I was giving more phone calls but not WhatsApp. The parents don't even have technology phones, so you can't communicate with them (ECTr 07).

In support of ECTr 07, ECTr 10 also noted that:

We used the WhatsApp group yea we created a group so I will do my lessons in video and then post it on the platform and then add my homework 's and everything on it and send it to put on the page for parents to download and give it to their kids. So, after their assignments, parents will also take a picture of them and send it to me privately but not put it on the page for me to mark and send it back to them (EcTr 10).

ECTr 11 also stated that:

We were using the radio program.

Another participant also voiced out that:

most of my children their parents will tell you, madam my phone is not WhatsApp friendly, I can't WhatsApp so it got to a time we were supposed to do radio learning. The radio-learning learners were asked to listen to a reading lesson or something else, but they will tell you that I don't have a radio to even listen to that lesson (ECTr 13).

A participant also said that:

Well as I said earlier, we were using YouTube videos, and we were going on zoom which wasn't easy. There were some hitches here and there and I also recorded a video on some of the lessons for the children to watch (ECTr 06).

ECTr 09 indicated that:

We were all using the Tv and radio.

ECTr 04 also revealed that:

So, in school what I could do in my own way was to come out with my laptop for them to see or we learn through the use of the laptop and other devices (ECTr 04).

Notwithstanding other early child teachers did not use any online modules and technology in teaching. For example, a participant stated that;

Myself I was not much into the online teaching. Though some of the teachers did but myself I didn't join them. Because of network problems. When school resumed, we were using zoom but I wasn't using it (ECTr 14).

ECTr 15 also affirmed that:

I wasn't doing online teaching at all.

A participant also articulated:

I was doing one on one teaching. I wasn't doing any online teaching because of network and or school we don't have electricity (ECTr 01).

From the fourth theme, participants cleared out that they used some online modules and technology in teaching during COVID-19. Some interviewees indicated that they

used Zoom, WhatsApp, and YouTube in teaching their learners. Other interviewees also said that they had radio lessons and they downloaded videos on their laptops to teach the learner. Other participants did not use any online modules and technology because of network problems and parents not having access to smartphones.

4.5.5 Individual play

The second research question led to the fifth topic, which is individual play. Participants mentioned that they encouraged students to play alone during play as part of this theme. What they said was as follows:

ECTr 14 noted that:

Yes, please before that covid we use to go out and play with our friends outside after that covid we seized everything. You will bring your toy from the house and I spray with the sanitizer and when it's time for break then you play with your toys. Before we even introduced the bringing the toys, I inform you about what is happening, the COVID-19 and how its spreads. So, they understood it.

Another participant stated that:

I was telling them but you know with these kids. Normally I even follow them when is break, I go and sit beside them watch them so that they wouldn't bring themselves together. But it was very difficult.

Also, ECTr 02 confirmed that:

I encouraged because they couldn't play in groups all the time, they had to play on their own. I must say that it wasn't very easy, in fact sometimes you will be there and a child is going to touch the other person, you will pick up the child to his or her sitting position but still that is the place that the child wants to go. we tried our best with different objects given to the children.

A teacher also identified that:

For them to do individual paly it was very difficult for the learners. Because as children that they are if you tell them to do things by themselves, they want to do what they want. They want the other person to join or they themselves will go and join the other person (ECTr 13).

In addition to what ECTr13 said, ECTr 09 also articulated that:

Yea but ensured social distancing. Individual play yes that they can play on their own. Not that we don't want them to play together but because of the situation we had at hand. You should learn to play alone.

A teacher also mentioned that:

Yes, I quite remember one boy telling me that teacher I want to play with my friend and I told him that because of the pandemic if you play with your friend and you get in touch with him and the person having the disease. He will be also affected by it. So, we placed items in the classroom for them to play with it. Sometimes we take off all the chairs and tables. And then you will see them sitting in their one corner doing their own thing (ECTr 10).

According to the replies above, teachers at the early childhood centres promoted individual play during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some teachers reported that learners used their own play materials from the house during break time. Participants also emphasised encouraging learners to play with their peers. The respondents also mentioned that they supported individual play because of the pandemic and its protocols, which is the current reality. Additionally, they promoted independent play to prevent crowding or gathering of learners.

4.6 Research Question Four

What challenges did teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early childhood centres in the Effutu Municipality?

The third research question looked at the challenges early childhood encountered during COVID-19. This research question explores the challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 in the early childhood centres during the COVID-19. Participants talked about the challenges they encountered at the early

childhood centres during COVID-19. In this research question the research had seven themes which are:

- Inadequate Resources
- Stress
- Risk of Contracting
- Challenge developing learner's social skills
- Quarantine space challenge
- Challenges using online modules and technology
- Income discrepancies

4.6.1 Inadequate resources

The first theme obtained from research question three is inadequate materials resources. Under this theme, the interviewees stated that they weren't getting materials such as nose masks, hand sanitizers, veronica buckets, tissues, and soaps to help them fight COVID-19. So, following the COVID-19 protocols was very difficult for them.

A participant stated that:

Yes, because we had to move from what we use to do to a new set of things. So, it was challenging. The government was not providing the materials and resources for the private schools. The sanitizers and nose mask were provided by the school. The government did provide some but it was not enough (ECTr 14).

It was also declared that:

Yea, even though the government provided some of the things, I remember we had some few sanitizers and few liquid soaps. The nose was given to only 2 class and I don't know if is because we were private school (ECTr 02).

ECTr 13 also notified that:

it was challenging. The government brought some through the GES and then because we are mission school are church also brought some

but the problem was, we had many classrooms, you know it would be better if each class to have their own veronica buckets for hand washing but here is the case the materials are few. So, all the kg blocks were supposed to manage one veronica bucket. So, the classes were taken turns to their hand washing (ECTr 13).

In addition, a participant declared that:

As I said earlier, I have to use some of my money to make nose mask for the learners. So, it was very challenging (ECTr 04).

Another teacher also mentioned that:

Yes, it was because the government provided it only twice. I don't even know whether it was the head who wasn't giving it us or what.

Also, a participant stated that:

Yes, very well. It doesn't come on time. As for when the government said it will be coming. They just said it will come but more than one week it wasn't coming. But we had reopened and we needed those things to work but prior to those things we had to wait it. Because it had to come to the regional to the district and to the schools. So, some it came but it didn't come on time. Some too were not enough. The sanitiser I remember we shared for each child but when they send it to the house, they didn't bring it again. So, when they don't bring it meanwhile, we are in school, and you don't have sanitizer meanwhile you are in school. What do you do? You have to give them additional ones to use (ECTr 07).

In support of ECTr 07, ECTr 10 articulated that:

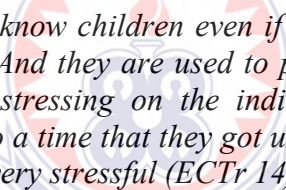
Yes, it was difficult so we have to buy some of the items ourselves although we heard the government has given GES some of the items to offer to us. The sanitizer, the liquid soap, and the nose mask it was difficult. So, we did was that we even bought our nose mask, we bought our sanitiser and fortunately too we got a parent too who offered to give us a sanitizer. So, we added everything and we were using it (ECTr 10).

Data from the respondents clearly demonstrates how challenging it was to obtain supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, including nose masks, hand sanitisers, tissues, veronica buckets, water, and soaps. Some participants claimed that the government was providing, but that it was not enough. Others said that they received

no materials at all in their schools. Others said they were unsure if the school's administrators were withholding the materials from them. Some of the participants even claimed their schools didn't have any water. They found it challenging to adhere to the COVID-19 protocols because of this. Considering that it is possible to follow the COVID-19 protocols without the materials.

4.6.2 Stress

The second theme from research question three is stress. The participants highlighted that working at the early childhood centre demands resulted from unprecedented stress. Some of the respondents from the study recounted that due the COVID-19 there was a much work load on them, which made the work very stressful. For example, a teacher complained that:



It was stressful you know children even if you tell them don't do this, they will still do it. And they are used to playing with each other and things. So, in fact stressing on the individualized thing was a bit challenging. It got to a time that they got used to it. But initially, it was challenging. It was very stressful (ECTr 14).

ECTr 15 also shared the view that:

It was stressful because at first, I was putting them in ten groups but because of that, we have to separate them and make sure you get five. So, imagine your number is forty or thirty-nine, you have to make sure everybody has done something (ECTr 15).

ECTr 11 also emphasized that:

It wasn't easy at that time it was very stressful.

A teacher confirmed that:

so initially when you bring the children out, at least they will be playing outside and you the teacher will just be observing and then relaxing but now we all have to be in the classroom. I had to always put an eye on everybody to see if they are not moving to a place where they could get the disease, sanitizing their hands every moment, cleaning their tables and other things. it was a bit stressful, seriously, we weren't used to it so all of a sudden you are supposed to do

something you weren't used to it and so, therefore, it brought up the stress (ECTr 02).

The comment by ECTr 13 agreed with this view:

It was very stressful because when you tell them when you are sick don't come to school just tell mommy to call me. They will not call but rather come to school with the sickness then you will call the parents to come for them (ECTr 13).

ECTr 03 also shared this view:

yea... because it gave us so much stress because you have to be careful so you don't get contact and there are certain things even if you yourself you get cold you are afraid that it might be something and the cold that came that time were not ordinary cold because you will get a cold that will last for about a week. parents were also giving us stress because there were afraid that their children will get contact with covid so when they come, they were always curious and ask questions like is the classroom clean? have you done this and that? how many times do you wash their hands? so it was really a stress to us and hectic thing to us (ECTr 03).

A teacher also remarked that:

It was very stressful because preparing teaching aids and improvising wasn't easy. Because of social distancing we have enough of the teaching aids. So, that is one object that you have to teach for the whole class. You have to make sure you get about ten. So, that the children will not use one (ECTr 4).

A participant confirmed that:

Yea it was very stressful. You know you have to do more talking, shouting and all that. It was really stressful and if it happens that you have to put the class in groups for them to play, it was very hectic, very stressful (ECTr 06).

In support of ECTr 06, ECTr 11 affirmed that:

It was very stressful. I have to clean all their pencils, markers and a lot. In fact, for some of the children when they are sick you need to carry them. You need to encourage them. You did more talking, and more education. Even going to their parent's houses. In fact, it stressed me a lot and I was pregnant at that time. I had kids also but they are also your kids. So, you need to make sure they are also fine. In fact, when I come and there is no water, I have to go and fetch the water myself because the children can't cross the road. I have to go and fetch myself if I don't get the elderly ones to go. So, you imagine fetching the

water and making sure there is water before the next day is very stressful (ECTr 07).

ECTr 09 also shared this view by expressing that:

In fact, when we reopened and then we realise that, you have to teach the child his or her own name everything. it was a bit challenging. So, what happened with all the e-learning and all that what happened. And later I realise they were from individual homes and then, and economic status vary, so where they were you know or maybe they may not have anybody in the family who has been to school. So, it was a bit tedious but I have to re-strategize and come to their level and assist them (ECTr 09).

The second theme emphasized how stressful it can be to teach young children. According to some teachers, they must improvise. Other participants stated that they were unable to recall anything they had learned in school before to the COVID-19 because the learners had stayed for almost a full year. They had to carry out remediation measures for them, which was highly difficult for them at work. Some respondents added that they had to be at work early in order to bring water to the classroom so that students could wash their hands each day before beginning to teach. They found these stressful.

4.6.3 Risk of contracting the virus

The following topic discusses the possibility of early childhood educators getting the COVID-19. Because they work with students who range in age from 4 to 6 years old and come from various backgrounds, some participants said they were more likely to contract the COVID-19. Here are a few examples to help:

ECTr 02 noted that:

I was teaching children and therefore we were at higher risk. you might not know, the children in the class are coming from different homes, different environments and you might not what somebody is bringing from the house to the school. you the teacher is attending to

all of these children and if they end up touching you, at the end of the day if someone is having Covid 19, you will really get it (ECTr 02).

In the same vein ECTr 13 remarked that:

Yes, because we are not in one area for the whole period, they will go home. You will tell them wash your hands and sanitize your hands. When they go home the parent even forget that there is COVID-19 so they will break the chain of sanitizing their hands and washing their hands. It is when they are in school that we tell them to wash their hands (ECTr 13).

ECTr 03 recalled:

Oh yes! because the one coming to your school you don't know whether the person is affected but I was saying that it's by the grace of God that we did not get infected (ECTr 03).

ECTr 06 identified that:

yea I was at a higher risk of contracting the pandemic you know, you come to school you involve yourself in a lot of activities. Going here and there you know we were at a higher risk of contracting the pandemic (ECTr 06).

In support of ECTr 06, ECTr 07 remarked:

Yes, I was very much at risk. Because we were not protected. Especially the lower class. You will be there and a child will come and hold you. Some of them will use their saliva to come and touch you. In fact, I was at higher risk. Looking at the fact that I had a baby, I was pregnant all of it. The children were coughing and I had to take them to the hospital. Their parents should even come and check what's going on, they will not come. I followed and checked to go their various house not once not twice. Some of their parents will not be around. So, you have to take care of that child before her parents come for her. And was at risk. I didn't know how to handle worst situation but I have been through. I was praying to God that I will not get some of these things (ECTr 07).

Another teacher said that:

In the school environment, I was at a higher risk because I was handling children and you talk to parents. These children are not in the same home, they all leave in a different home with different things altogether, so if a child goes home. You don't know how the parent

handles this child. Now he is coming back to school, you are also from a different place, you getting in touch with this particular child or to them was at risk. We were at risk (ECTr 10).

Respondents believe they were more likely to contract the Covid based on the answers provided above. They noted that all of the students come from various backgrounds and that they are unsure of whether their houses follow the COVID-19 protocols or not. A few responders also said that they occasionally lose themselves and touch a few students.

4.6.4 Challenge developing learner's social skills

According to the interview data, it was quite difficult for learners to improve their social skills during COVID-19. The interviewees claimed that it was very difficult to build learners' social skills during the COVID-19 since various teaching strategies were not used in the classroom. ECTr 02 responded in this way:

it was a bit challenging due to groups and other things, children end up building teamwork, they are able to cooperate with their friends, know more about them, discuss some issues, their own personal issues, family issues and some other things but here is the case you are been restricted to even talk more, you are supposed to talk less, cover your mouth and do social distancing, so it was a bit challenging.

Another participant articulated that:

Yea during social gatherings children learn how to cooperate with one another so, the COVID-19 made the children not to work in groups again. There was nothing like cooperation again. It was self-play, so there was nothing like learning in a cooperative way. There was nothing like team play (ECTr 04).

ECTr 06 also confirmed that:

It was really challenging developing the children's social skills, you now children learn to tolerate, to accept other people's views when they are playing freely not restricted play. So, they are being put in groups and in these groups, we make sure they follow Covid protocols, distancing themselves. so, it was very difficult developing their social skills. You then have to talk to them, like teach you actually have

taught the social skills mean while they have to experience it. So, the Covid became an obstacle.

In addition, ECTr 09 mentioned that:

Because they have to abide with this social distancing idea, in fact like in my class I have deaf student. So, if for instance there is a concept that the special needs child is not taken. A colleague or a peer could have helped, you know helped her to do it. Sometimes holding the hands to help do it. But because of that we couldn't do that. So, what we usually do is that I have to repeat, keep repeating the actions for them to pick. And that was a bit stressful and time consuming. That was the order of the day so you can't complain (ECTr 09).

Another teacher also commented that:

It was challenge because you know sometimes when they are in this group, they those who have more idea about help their friends but this one whether you know or not know you all have to keep quiet listen to your teacher so socially children became mid and they weren't friendly at all when the pandemic was there (ECTr 10).

ECTr 11 also stated that:

As for the social skills, it went down because we were not using group activities

A teacher also indicated:

So, it was very challenging but if your group has a large number I will reduce the number, so you will still get a partner to work with. But they won't be as many as previously, maybe three or four members in one group so that they will get a space for the social distancing. So, they will still get their social skills (ECTr 13).

Another interviewee also stated that:

It wasn't easy as I said earlier though we were dwelling on the individual thing we gave them the opportunity to express whatever they've learnt or they've seen during the lesson. Sometimes we even call them Infront of the class as they talk they are able to develop communication skills, Confidence skills and then even social skills as well (ECTr 14).

A teacher stated that she did group activities but it wasn't how she wanted it to be.

This is what she said:

It wasn't like how we wanted. It was like they were restricted and anything they do at the centres one person cannot be there. Definitely there should be two or more. So, they were asked not to go there (ECTr 01).

Data collected from the participants revealed that it was very difficult for early childhood teachers to develop learner's social skills. Teachers indicated that some teaching methods like group method of teaching, role play, and dramatization help learners to develop their social skills because learners work as a team. Because of COVID-19, they were not using all those methods used to develop learner's social skills. And also, learners were not playing together in the school, they played individually which made them very timid in the classroom.

4.6.5 Income discrepancies

It emerged from the data that early childhood teachers were having difficulties getting their income from the government. The comments from the data suggested that they were not having any difficulties with their income prior to the COVID-19. Responses from the participants revealed that even those who were paid, none of them was satisfy with their income. ECTr 14 shared the view by explaining that:

The income comes from the learner's school fees. That is where they will generate the income from and because they stayed home for a longer period of time, they weren't getting money to pay us when school reopened. And even when school reopened the learners, they were not paying their school fees on time because some of their parents lost their jobs. So, it was very difficult getting our salary and you know it is a private school. So, the first term when school reopened it wasn't easy for us (ECTr 14)

ECTr 02 also said that:

oh... it really affected me because I wasn't getting the original income that I was receiving early on. it was like the salary being divided into

two and you are given half of it and expenses were huge at that time so we struggled(ECTr 02)

A teacher also stated that:

it affected our income because the pay that we were getting when the covid wasn't there wasn't coming like that and you have adjusted yourself because there is no money in the system so how much you are been paid you have to take it like that (ECTr 03).

Also, it was articulated by a teacher:

Yes, it affected my income. The face mask I told you. Because some of the learners don't have a face mask. So, the ones we have we buy to give it to the learners (ECTr 07).

In support of ECTr 07, a teacher said ECTr 10 identified that:

Oh, it really affected it in the sense that if I use to buy five things at the end of the month at the market now, I have to reduce it and buy two. If not at the end of the day I will go back to square one. So, it really affected it.

The teachers admitted that it was very challenging for them to get paid during the COVID-19. They said that the pay they used to receive before the COVID-19 was different from the pay they were paid during the COVID-19. The Data revealed that early childhood teachers were not satisfied with their income.

4.6.6 Quarantine space challenge

The quarantine space challenge is another theme emerging from research question 3. On the field participants highlighted that it was very challenging to get quarantine space for learners who may contract the COVID-19 and learners who become sick.

What the participants said is outlined as follows:

ECTr 14 stated that:

I will say no because in the first place when you come and we check your temperature and it is not good. I will not even allow you to the school compound. We've had cases like when a child is sick after being brought to school. But when it happens like that, we call their parents

to come for them. We have a sick bay but we couldn't donate that place as an isolation centre. We weren't having quarantine space (ECTr 14).

It was expressed by ECTr 15 that:

We weren't having any additional quarantine space. As I said earlier the place was too small (ECTr 15).

This is how a teacher put it:

It was difficult so we did call parents to come for them. When we notice a child is sick, we just call the parent to come for her. No there was no isolation areas and staff because the school is not having enough teachers and enough space or additional classroom for that (ECTr 01).

ECTr13 articulated that:

It was difficult the same class I am teaching they dedicated some part for isolation but the quarantine you know we don't have enough space in our school to say this is a quarantine space to quarantine those who we think have COVID-19. So, when we isolate you the best way to do is to call your parents to come for you (ECTr13).

It was stated by a teacher that:

There was no space so it was very challenging (ECTr 04).

ECTr 06 also remarked that:

It was difficult, we were not having enough space for children who come down with the COVID. It was very difficult (ECTr 06).

A teacher articulated that:

It was very difficult for the fact that we don't have space and the children are many. And we have to use the headmistress's office. I didn't have any quarantine from my class. We refer and go to the headteacher's office for the quarantine room. That was where the school, all the schools the A and B. So, you can imagine (ECTr 07).

Another teacher mentioned that:

No, here we don't even have enough space o. So, that one no (ECTr 09).

Data revealed that getting a quarantine space for learners during COVID-19 was a challenge. Some Early childhood teachers noted that they were using their head

teacher's office as a quarantine space. Other early childhood teachers also indicated that they were using the same class as their quarantine and isolation space for learners who might contract COVID-19. It was clear that it was very challenging getting a quarantine space in the early childhood centres.

4.6.7 Challenges using online modules and technology

The last theme under research question 3 is challenges using online modules and technology. Teachers stated that during the COVID-19 they were using online modules and technology in teaching the learners which were very challenging using them. The participants supported this theme with the following statements:

ECTr14 declared that:

Yes, at first especially when we started. When we started some of the parents were not able to get in touch on time. Even we the teachers too sometimes due to network problems and credit itself. You know it consumes a lot of credit so they were a little challenge we had (ECTr 14).

ECTr 01 also specified that:

It was difficult because even how to get network and teach was difficult. So as for me I didn't do at all (ECTr 01).

ECTr 11 pointed out that:

It was very difficult using the radio program because the children were not having some of the radios in their homes, so we came with radios and we did a program in the school (ECTr 11).

ECTr02 also mentioned that:

it was, sometimes the network wasn't all that good because of the environment that we find ourselves so it was really difficult and we weren't paid on regular basis so sometimes even to get airtime to be online for that particular moment you have you have to teach was difficult (ECTr 02).

ECTr 13 also stated that:

There are difficulties because let's say I am using WhatsApp I want to maybe send something on WhatsApp for learners to do they will tell you they can't access the internet and then even if I am using WhatsApp their phones cannot use WhatsApp. At this part of the fishing area, they use yam phones yes, because sometimes you have to send a lesson to a page and due to network... where am staying doesn't have a good network so you have to wake up in midnight and send it (ECTr 13).

Another teacher also responded that:

Yea there were a lot of difficulties with regard to the use of zoom, you know the learners they , can't operate the zoom themselves, is the parent that have to do it and make sure they are online and we had cases where parents had no idea about this very APP zoom. So, it was a bit difficult but the Education went and parents became informed. So later we were not having those hitches anymore (ECTr 06).

In support of ECTr 06, ECTr 07 mentioned that:

It was very difficult because most of the parents I had to have in my class are illiterate and they don't have modern phones like some of us do. They don't have WhatsApp they are not on Facebook. They are using the yam phones. So, it was very difficult for me. Because I wanted to share a lot of things at a time. You see WhatsApp will make it easy. But the phone call you have to call this one and call another person, another credit. But the parents I had in my class, their parents don't have those phones. Some literates have WhatsApp phones but they don't know how to use them. Because most of their parents work at the shore and don't have access to the internet (ECTr 07).

ECTr 10 also point out that:

Yes, because you will do the lesson you will post on the page and then parents will tell you because I don't have data me WhatsApp, I don't normally go there so the lesson became of and on. Some parents were very good with what they were helping their kids with but others don't participate in it at all. They will tell you where I am my network is not strong my phone, I can't be buying data so it was difficult (ECTr 10).

Data from the responders reveals that using online modules and technology was particularly difficult for teachers during COVID-19. Some teachers claimed that some parents did not own smartphones, which made it challenging for students to participate in online learning. Some have also said that although the government instituted radio lessons under the COVID-19, some parents still did not have radios in

their homes, which further complicated teaching and learning. Teachers of young children also complained that the network made it difficult for them to conduct online instruction and that the online modules they were using used a lot of data. Additionally, teachers mentioned in their interview responses that parents had complained about network issues.

4.7 Discussion of Results

Early Childhood Teachers views on COVID-19 pandemic in the Early Childhood Centres

Early childhood educators possess a comprehensive awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the research. Teachers at the early childhood centers ensured that students are aware of the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to awareness in the classroom setting. The study found out that early childhood teachers have in-depth understanding on COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers used different methods and strategies at the early childhood centres to make sure learners are aware of the COVID-19 pandemic and its safety measures and practices. The study also found out that as part of their everyday routine, teachers educate learners on the COVID-19 by using teaching learning materials such as pictures of how the Covid-19 spreads and this was done during school hours.

The study also revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has both positive and negative at the early childhood centres. When it comes to the negative side, teachers revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the educational system at the early childhood centres prior to Covid-19 pandemic some adjustments were made when it comes to the teaching methods they used at the early childhood centres. Teachers had to make sure that whatever strategic they used at the early childhood Centre meets the

COVID-19 protocols. This made teaching very difficult at the early childhood centres. Teachers also made sure the early childhood environment was always safe for learners at the early childhood Centre.

The study also revealed that early childhood teachers also have a positive view on the COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to the positive aspect teachers revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic made teachers at the centres adapted to a new way of teaching. Teachers were using online method of teaching which the norm at the early childhood centres wasn't.

The study found out that teachers at the early childhood centres have a positive and negative views on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Role Early Childhood Teachers Played in Ensuring a Safe Environment During Teaching in the Early Childhood Centres During COVID-19.

This study found that educators were crucial in maintaining a secure atmosphere during the COVID-19 pandemic. By safeguarding themselves, safeguarding the learners by developing the COVID-19 protocols, and raising awareness of COVID-19, teachers admitted to having played a significant role in ensuring a safe environment amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is in line with UNICEF (2020) assertion that teachers played a significant role in ensuring safety during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of the facts they have on COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers knowing the facts about COVID-19 will not only protect themselves but also their learners (UNICEF, 2020).

Again, the respondents reported to have made sure that learners are safe by practicing social distancing. In practicing social distancing, data from this study revealed it was part of the teacher's everyday routine. The findings revealed teachers did not

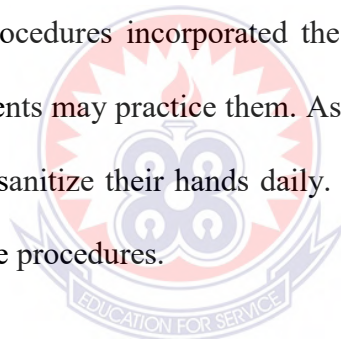
encourage large groups during classroom activities. The finding of this present study substantiates earlier findings that children's activities were restricted and limited to individual-based task as well as small groups (Sheila et al., 2021). Nonetheless, practicing social distancing was a difficult task during the COVID-19 pandemic because learners were used to physical contact prior to the COVID-19. These findings corroborate the findings of Sheila et al. (2021) who found out that teachers were finding it difficult to restrict physical affection of learners in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another role played by teachers during COVID-19 is cleaning and disinfecting the early childhood environment. In this study, findings indicated that as part of teachers ensuring safety in the school environment, they made sure they cleaned and disinfect the school environment. By doing this, respondents noted that they wash the teaching materials of the learners with soap and after that, they sanitize them with sanitizer, respondents said they do this after every lesson when the objects are been used. Respondents in the study said they disinfect the classroom with a disinfectant every morning before learners come to school and after school. They also clean and sanitize their table and chairs every morning and after school. The findings lend ample support to the work of Paola et al. (2021), who found that, early childhood centres dedicated time before and after learners arrive to clean surfaces and disinfect materials, and teachers were assigned to dedicate cleaning to the centres.

In similar evidence, the study indicated teachers encourage learners to stay home when they are sick. In addition, they called parents to tell them to let their wards stay home when they are sick. Findings from this study indicated teachers encouraged learners to stay home because they do not know the child's sickness. Also,

respondents stated that even if the learner comes to school sick, they call their parents to come for them or they take the learner to the hospital. The findings of this present study bear resemblance to the findings of the department of health, of the Republic of South Africa (2020) which found that school heads and administrators encouraged learners to stay home when they are sick.

In addition, the researcher referenced Peters' (2020) theory of viral modernity in order to respond to research question one. According to Peters (2020), viruses have an impact on human lives and revolutionize how people live. In this study, the pandemic changed the culture at the early development centers. Teachers changed their procedures in order to comply with the pandemic protocol and COVID-19. Teachers who adopted the new procedures incorporated the COVID-19 guidelines into their daily lessons so that students may practice them. As an illustration, they might wear a nasal mask or wash and sanitize their hands daily. The early childhood centers used this as part of their routine procedures.



The Teaching Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Employed in Teaching During The COVID-19 Pandemic.

COVID-19 had an impact on the instructional strategies employed at the early childhood centre. To satisfy the COVID-19 protocols, the study's participants reported to have used some teaching methods that helped in mitigating against the spread of the pandemic. Teaching and learning were particularly challenging as a result of the teachers' use of discussion and demonstration techniques of instruction during COVID-19, according to the findings. Because at the early childhood Centre different methods of teaching must be used in teaching and learning for learners to grasp what the facilitator is using. This finding is in agreement with Jikpamu (2020)

who reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning environment, teaching methods, policies, and national standards of the early childhood sector.

The results of this study suggested that COVID-19 resulted in changes to the instructional techniques utilized in Early Childhood centers. Because these two do not promote physical contact, the respondents noted that during the pandemic teachers tended to utilize discussion and demonstration methods in the classroom. Also, teachers discouraged some teaching strategies including the group method, field trips, dramatization, and role-playing. Teachers also noted that learning and teaching had shifted to be more teacher-centered. Also, teachers noted that they choose those methods because they didn't want learners to be together. And this collaborates with the findings of Ganga and Smith (2020) who found that teachers have changed teaching practices in response to the pandemic. Also this study's findings is comparable to a study by Akram, Aslam, Saleem and Parveen (2020) which found out that as a result of the pandemic early childhood educators have been obliged to examine pedagogical techniques to provide quality education to students and make modifications to their curriculum and instruction.

Findings from this study also identified that teachers at the Early Childhood Centre used online modules and technology in teaching and learning during COVID-19. Teachers mentioned that online modules such as zoom, YouTube, and WhatsApp were used in teaching during the COVID-19. Also, some teachers said they did radio lessons.

According to the findings study, early childhood center teachers promoted solo play during COVID-19. Because they didn't want to see students huddled together or playing rough, the teachers said they promoted independent play. The survey found

that students bring their playthings from home to use for their playtime, according to the teachers. This result is also analogous to that of Paola et al. (2020), who found that teachers had doubled the time allotted for solo play.

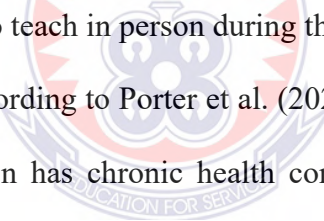
Challenges Early Childhood Teachers Encountered During The COVID-19 Pandemic

The findings from this study indicated that it was challenging for early childhood teachers to get materials and resources such as nose masks, sanitizer, veronica buckets, and water to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers at early childhood centres reported that the government was not providing them with materials and resources that were used to fight the COVID-19. Some also stated that they were provided with the materials but they weren't enough, they provided some themselves. This made the work very difficult for them as teachers.

Additionally, findings indicated that working in early childhood centers during COVID-19 was quite difficult. Because they were unfamiliar with the illness, teachers reported that working with young children during COVID-19 was very challenging. They also noted how challenging it was to ensure that the students followed the guidelines each day. Teachers observed that students were having a difficult time remembering what they had been taught previously because they had spent a significant amount of time at home during the lockdown, which made their work extremely challenging. Early childhood education was said to be particularly frustrating by teachers during the COVID-19. Findings also showed that teachers had a large number of learners in class and found it difficult to teach learners during the COVID-19. These findings correspond to Claxton, Levitt and Tarrant (2020) who reported in their findings that the additional responsibility of taking precautions and

continually telling young children to stay apart, wear nose mask, and wash their hands were surely demanding and difficult for early childhood teachers.

Also, results showed that working at the early childhood centre was very stressful during the COVID-19 because there was a workload on teachers at the early childhood centres. Teachers reported in the current study that Due to workload and the new rules made the work very difficult and stressful for them. These abrupt findings collaborate with the findings of Besser, Lotem and Zeigler (2022) which found that high levels of stress related to increasing workload, loss of control over work discissions, blurred professional and personal lines, concerns about colleagues and most vulnerable learners, social isolation and the stress- related of online teaching itself.



Teachers who continued to teach in person during the COVID-19 were at a higher risk of getting COVID-19, according to Porter et al. (2020) research, which noted that this vulnerable workforce often has chronic health concerns. The possibility of getting COVID-19, according to this study, was one of the difficulties teachers faced during COVID-19. Early childhood educators said in this study that they can't promise to touch children because they work with them on a daily basis. Teachers even do the diaper and nose-blowing at that age. They, therefore, had a larger chance of getting the virus. Teachers also mentioned that because everyone comes from diverse backgrounds, it is impossible to predict who will introduce the pandemic to the classroom setting.

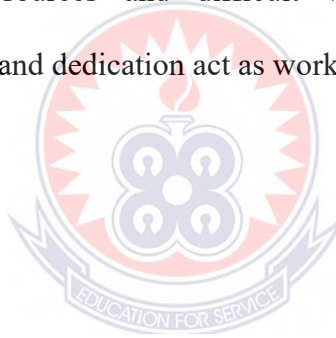
During COVID-19, teachers also faced the problem of helping `learners develop their social skills. Teachers reported that it was very challenging for them to help students improve their social skills since they were required to adhere to the COVID-19

protocols, which include social separation. Because they shunned all instructional strategies that promote social skills development in students.

The results of this study also showed that it was quite difficult to find quarantine space for students who might have COVID-19. During the COVID-19, teachers complained that there wasn't enough room in their buildings for quarantine. The same classroom was reportedly being used by some teachers as a quarantine area for students at the school. Other teachers recounted keeping learners in quarantine in the head teacher's office. This finding is comparable to Roy (2020) which indicated that organizing an additional quarantine space for ill children in childcare institutes residents is herculean and difficult for teachers.

Another finding from this study is challenges using online modules and technology during the COVID-19. Teachers reported that they were having network problems. Some teachers reported that they were not having money to buy data for the online lessons. Findings indicated that most parents weren't having smart phones, so reaching learners during online lessons was very difficult them. Teachers also mentioned they did radio lessons which was also difficult for them because some learners were not having radios in the house and also some other teachers indicated that there were not having electricity in their school. The findings also indicated that teachers used zoom, YouTube, WhatsApp and radio in delivering their lessons. Teachers also mentioned using online modules and technology was very challenging during the COVID-19. This finding conforms to the finding of Besser, Lotem and Zeigher-Hill (2022) which found out that abrupt shifts to online teaching were associated with greater levels of psychological stress among teachers.

Another challenge early child teachers encountered during the COVID-19 is income discrepancies. The study found out during the COVID-19 some teachers were not paid. Teachers mentioned that because learners stayed home for a long time and school resumed, they weren't getting the same income as before. Teachers noted that their income was generated from school fees learners paid. Other teachers reported that they were paid alright but because the government wasn't bringing enough materials and resources, they were using their own money to buy some of the materials such as nose masks, sanitizers and veronica buckets for learners to use. This means the COVID-19 affected their income. This finding adds up to Whitebook et al. (2014) where it was stated that other obstacles and problems, such as income discrepancies, perks, resources and difficult working circumstances however outweigh job satisfaction and dedication act as workplace stressors.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter deals with a summary of the findings of the study. Conclusions are drawn based on the findings and recommendations made based on the objectives.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major disruptor of all spheres of educational systems. The systems at all levels had to suspend some activities to help limit the spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19. Early childhood teachers and caregivers had to ensure they take steps to help prevent COVID-19 from entering and spreading among early childhood learners to create a safe environment for the learners. While the COVID-19 pandemic had many remarkable features, the magnitude and speed with which early childhood teachers had to react to it and ultimately change all areas of their job are unrivalled. Early childhood teachers, ensuring this transition, were thrust into the role of assisting learners to effectively learn in a highly uncertain and ever-changing environment. This prompted the researcher explore the Views of Early childhood teachers on the COVID-19 pandemic and lived experiences of early childhood teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Effutu Municipality. Specifically, the study sought to explore the role of early childhood teachers in ensuring a safe environment during teaching in the early childhood centres during Covid- 19 within the Effutu Municipality; examine the teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Effutu Municipality; and finally explore the challenges childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19

pandemic in the centres within the Effutu Municipality. To achieve this, a phenomenological design was employed. Total of 15 early childhood teachers were interviewed. An online qualitative software called Taguette, version 1.3.0, was used to analyse the data. Four study questions were used to guide the interviews. In all three questions, the researcher found sixteen (16) themes. To convey the major concerns that emerged from the data, the data were summed up, clarified, and organised into themes.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The following findings were emerged from the study.

1. Regarding the views of early childhood teachers, the study found out that teachers had positive and negative views on the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Concerning the role early childhood teachers played in ensuring a safe environment, the study found out that early childhood teachers played a significant role in ensuring a safe environment amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the roles played in ensuring safety include ensuring that the children wore their nose masks throughout the school hours; encouraging learners to wash and sanitize their hands regularly; encouraging and practicing social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting indoor and outdoor learning environment and encouraging learners to stay home when they are sick.
3. Regarding the teaching strategies early childhood teachers employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes to the instructional techniques utilised in early childhood education, hence the teachers' adopted strategies that satisfied the COVID-19 protocols established by the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Education. They noted to have used teacher-centered methods including

discussion and demonstration but discouraged child-centered strategies including the group method, field trips, dramatization, and role-play.

4. In examining the challenges early childhood teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings highlighted multiplicity of challenges linked to difficulty in getting materials and resources such as nose masks, sanitizer, veronica buckets, and water to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulty in ensuring that the learners followed the COVID-19 guidelines each day, stressful conditions was a result of the workload, difficulty in finding quarantine space for learners who might have COVID-19, difficulty in using online modules and technology during the COVID-19 as a result of poor network and inadequate gadgets.

5.3 Conclusions

The researcher after carefully studying the major findings of the lived experiences of teachers at early childhood centres during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Effutu Municipality, draws the conclusions that:

1. Early childhood teachers have a fair Knowledge on what Covid-19 Pandemic is. The study revealed that teachers both positive and negative views on the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. In order to maintain a safe environment during the COVID-19 epidemic, early childhood educators were crucial. The roles that were played in ensuring safety included making sure that the learners wore their nose masks throughout the school day, encouraging learners to regularly wash and sanitize their hands, encouraging and practicing social distance, cleaning and disinfecting the indoor and outdoor learning environments, and advising

learners to stay home when they were sick. These measures put in place by the early childhood teachers reduced the risk of the learners contracting the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Teachers employed practices that complied with the COVID-19 guidelines set out by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused alterations to the instructional strategies used in early childhood education. Discussion and demonstration were employed as part of teacher-centered teaching techniques. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic, child-centered teaching strategies like the group method, field trip, dramatization, and role-playing were not used.
4. Early childhood teachers faced multiple challenges which include difficulty in getting materials and resources such as nose masks, sanitizer, veronica buckets, and water to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulty in ensuring that the learners followed the COVID-19 guidelines each day, stressful conditions was a result of the workload, difficulty in finding quarantine space for learners who might have COVID-19, difficulty in using online modules and technology during the COVID-19 as a result of poor network and inadequate gadgets.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of the study;

1. To ensure that early childhood teachers play roles in ensuring a safety environment amidst pandemic, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, Effutu Education Directorate and School Management Committee should consider motivating early childhood teachers to hold on to the positive practice on the roles they played in ensuring safety.

Specific motivational packages in form of funding for refresher courses, study leave should be instituted for such teachers to frequently update their knowledge on safety issues at the early childhood settings.

2. Early childhood teachers must pursue professional development opportunities, especially in the area of using technology as the medium for instruction at the early childhood level. Equally important is that teachers who found success during their experience with online learning share details of that success with colleagues and other teaching professionals during ‘professional learning community’ trainings. Sharing their learnings with others enhances the collective professional expertise of at the early childhood level.
3. The study further recommends that the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service and Effutu Education directorate make available ICT resources and facilities to both teachers and learners and digitize curricular materials for effective implementation of virtual learning in such pandemics. Again, Ghana Education Service should provide high-speed Internet access and devices with built in cellular coverage to early childhood centres.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Further research on the phenomena may use a quantitative research technique and a different research design as this study used a qualitative study approach.

The long-term impact of COVID-19 on early childhood education can also be examined in future studies using the same methodology and research design. Other researchers may choose to conduct their studies using a different theoretical framework, even with the same sample size.

Other scholars can examine the experiences early childhood educators had before and after COVID-19.



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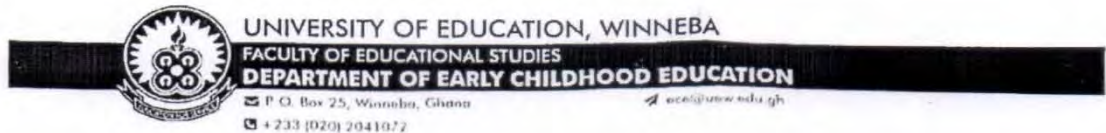
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Introductory Letter



FES/DECE/A.1

5th September, 2022

The Director
Ghana Education Services
Effutu Municipal Assembly
Winneba

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

We write to introduce to you Ms. Tracy Owusu with index number 202121353 who is an M. Phil student in the above department. She was admitted in 2020/2021 academic year and has successfully completed her course work and is to embark on her thesis on the topic: "*lived experiences of teachers at Early Childhood centres during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Effutu Municipality*".

Ms. Tracy Owusu is to collect data for her thesis, and we would be most grateful if she could be given the needed assistance.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Subbey".

DR. MICHAEL SUBBEY
AG. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT



APPENDIX B

GES Introductory Letter

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

In case of reply the number and
Date of this letter should be
Quoted



REPUBLIC OF GHANA

MUNICIPAL EDUCATION OFFICE
POST OFFICE BOX 54
WINNEBA
TEL: 03323 22075
Email: geseffutu@gmail.com

My Ref. No: GES/CR/EMEOWW/LC.80/VOL.6/48
Your Ref. No:.....

DATE: 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2022


INTRODUCTORY LETTER

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 15th September, 2022 seeking permission to collect data for your thesis in the Municipality.

Permission has therefore be granted to Ms. Tracy Owusu, an M.Phil. student from the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba to collect data for her thesis on the topic: "*Lived experiences of teachers at Early Childhood centers during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Effutu Municipality*".

You are to ensure that the data collection process does not disrupt teaching and learning in the schools.

Headteachers and staff are to cooperate with the student to collect relevant data for her work while ensuring that she abides by the ethics of the teaching profession.


MABEL JUDITH MICAH (MRS)
MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
EFFUTU-WINNEBA

THE MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR
EFFUTU MUNICIPAL EDUCATION OFFICE
WINNEBA

DISTRIBUTION:

DR. MICHAEL SUBBEY
ACTING HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
DEPT. OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION
WINNEBA.

MS. TRACY OWUSU
DEPT. OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION
WINNEBA

✓ HEADTEACHER
CONCERNED SCHOOLS
WINNEBA

Copy to: - All SISOs
Effutu Municipality

VIM

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule for Early Childhood Teachers

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

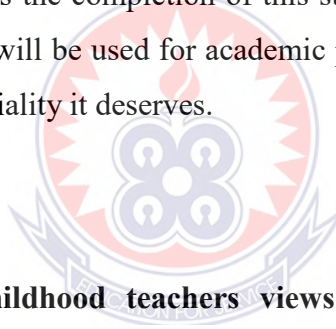
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Dear Respondent,

I am Tracy Owusu, a Master of Philosophy candidate of the University of Education, Winneba. As part of the requirements for the programme, I am researching on the topic “Lived Experiences of Teachers at Early Childhood Centres During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Effutu Municipality”. I wish to request you to respond to these questions with frankness and objectivity to obtain needed information for this study. Your contribution towards the completion of this study is highly appreciated and the information you provide will be used for academic purposes only and shall be treated with the utmost confidentiality it deserves.

Thank You.



SECTION A: Early Childhood teachers views on COVID-19 in the Effutu Municipality

1. What view do you hold on COVID-19?
2. How do you think it spread?
3. How do you protect yourself from the COVID-19 pandemic within the school environment?

SECTION B: The Role of Early Childhood Teachers in Ensuring a Safe Environment During Teaching in the Early Childhood Centres During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

4. How do protect others within the school environment from the COVID-19?
5. How did you help spread awareness about COVID-19?

6. What measures did you take to help the learners to establish protocols?
7. How do you ensure social distancing?
8. How do you supervise the wearing of the nose mask?
9. Did you supervise the fumigation of your classroom environment?
10. Did you ensure screening protocol at learner's arrival?
11. Did you dedicate time for learners to clean surfaces?
12. Did you dedicate time for learners to disinfect materials?
13. Did you encourage learners to stay home when they were sick?
14. Did you discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives awards to prevent sick children from coming to school?
15. Did you encourage individual play?
16. Did you designate additional staff and areas for isolation for children?
17. Did you engage in less physical contact with children as compared to prior COVID-19 pandemic?
18. Did you ensure small and stable groups for daily centres activities?
19. What other role did you play in ensuring safety during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SECTION C: Teaching Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Employed in Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1. Has the COVID-19 affected the learning environment?
2. In your view, as the COVID-19 affected teaching methods used in the early childhood centres?

Prompt

- How has the covid -19 affected the Group method of teaching at the early childhood centre?
- How has the COVID-19 affected the role Play method of teaching at the early childhood centre?
- How has the COVID-19 affected dramatization at the early childhood centre?
- How has the COVID-19 affected Field trips method of teaching at the early childhood centre?

- What other method or strategies do you think the COVID-19 affected?
3. What methods did you employ in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - What informed you about choosing those methods?
 4. What technology and online modules did you use in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic at the early childhood centre?

Prompt

Example zoom, WhatsApp, YouTube, Microsoft teams, and google classroom

5. Were there any difficulties in using the technology and online modules in teaching the learners at the early childhood centre during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SECTION D: Challenges Childhood Teachers Encountered During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Centres.

1. Were there income discrepancies during the COVID-19 pandemic at the early childhood centres?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your income as an early childhood teacher?
3. Was it challenging getting resources and materials to fight the pandemic upon resumption of school?
4. How challenging was the working circumstances at your centre during the pandemic?
5. How herculean were activities during the pandemic as compared to prior pandemic?
6. Did the demands result in unprecedented stress?
7. Has the pandemic lowered your sense of professional well-being making you more unsure about your future career prospects? How?
8. Do you think you were at higher risk of contracting COVID-19?
9. How challenging was it developing the learner's social skills through group activities?
10. How difficult was it to organise additional quarantine space for ill children?

Thank You.