

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**THE IMPACT OF PLAY ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AT EFFIDUASE SOUTH CIRCUIT IN THE  
SEKYERE EAST DISTRICT**



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**MASTER OF EDUCATION**



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**MARCH, 2022**

## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

I, **Esther Serwaa**, hereby declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotation and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Signature: .....

Date: Tuesday, November 08, 2022

### Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that, the preparation and supervision of this research work was done in accordance with guidance for the supervision of research work as laid down by the School of Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba.

Mr. Eric Ofosu-Dwamena

Signature:

Date: Tuesday, November 08, 2022



## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, brother and friend, Doris Aborone, Osei-Owusu Emmanuel and Christiana Agyeiwaah Ankrah respectively whose inspiration and desire for me to succeed has been the single driving force that has enabled me to be where I am today.



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact game and play has on skills development in early childhood education in schools at Effiduase South Circuit in the Sekyere East District. Descriptive survey design was employed for the study. A sample of 200 participants was selected using purposive sampling technique for the study. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS-version 2.1) was used to aid in the analysis of the quantitative data. It was found out that children who were exposed to various forms of play perform well in their cognitive, motor, social and emotional and speech and language skills development. Based on the findings it was concluded that provision of different types of play and play materials gave the children opportunity to learn through manipulating and experimenting for themselves. Finally, it is recommended that, the Ministry of Education needs to come up with clear policy guidelines regarding play in pre-school centres. The supervision of ECE centres' need to be enhanced to ensure teachers allocate adequate time and play materials to enable children develop skills for holistic development. Also, teachers should be encouraged to take a major role in planning and organizing play activities.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Overview**

This chapter gives an insight into the background to the study, statement of the problem, theoretical and conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study and the research questions, which serves as a guide to the study. It also deals with the significance of the study, delimitation, limitations of the study and definition of terms.

#### **1.2 Background to the Study**

The early years are the time to build a strong foundation in all developmental areas. Meeting specific milestones in all five domains of development and learning helps early graders establish behaviours and skills that will make them successful. Early Childhood Education refers to the educational programmes and strategies geared toward children from birth to the age of eight. This time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person's life. Early childhood education often focuses on guiding children to learn through play. Learning through play is a common teaching philosophy for young children. Jean Piaget developed the PILES (Physical, Intellectual, language, emotional and Social) theme to meet the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of children. Piaget's constructivist theory emphasizes hands-on educational experiences, giving children the chance to explore and manipulate objects.

Innovation has taken almost every aspect of life, from technology to education, is ever increasing in our world today. Not all that long ago there were one-classrooms with a single teacher instructing students of all ages. Looking back on our education system of the last hundred years, we can easily see how far we have come. We can only imagine what the future holds for the students of tomorrow. The evolution of education can be supported by the research and drive for going above and beyond, the fervour to improve learning, and the encouragement and passion to think outside the box. Newer approaches to theory and practice have done an excellent job of extending the view of learning to include areas such as physical (e.g., fine and gross motor skills), social (e.g., empathy and theory of mind), emotional (e.g., development self-regulation and even self-conscious emotions), and creative development (e.g., divergent thinking, making and expressing). This broad view of learning is a tremendous step forward in our understanding.

However, such a view fails to capture the real nature of learning-to learn and particularly the skills required in learning to learn that truly allow children to be prepared for 21st century opportunities (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2016). Oscar Wilde once said, “Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth learning can be taught.” There are many different ways of learning; teaching is only one of them. We learn a great deal on our own, in independent study or play. Research shows that play is an integral part of that education. Throughout history, from Aristotle to Montessori, the masters of education have conveyed the overlaying theme of “play” as a vital key to a child’s development. With this simple yet complex act being so crucial, one can only assume that it is the core to curriculum in the classroom for young children.

Developmental appropriateness describes an approach to teaching which respects both the age and the individual needs of each child. The idea is that the programme should fit the child; the child shouldn't have to fit the programme. "In 2018, the continuity of teaching and learning across kindergarten to Year 2 has been a major focus area in our efforts to provide all children with a great start to learning in the early years. Embedding Age-appropriate pedagogies in our state schools provide a strong foundation for our young learners — engaging and motivating them, and supporting their learning success" (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2016). Research evidence has suggested that children's development is largely influenced by processes of cognitive construction when learners are actively engaged (Piaget, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978). Instructional processes that are child-centred and driven by an instructional approach that sees the child as a complex being with rich and unique potential enable the differential learning needs of children to be accommodated.

Reflective teaching is a significant element in student teachers' initial training programme. It has also been widely acknowledged by many researchers as an approach that could promote teachers' professional development and improves the quality of teaching and learning. Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2011) contend that reflective teaching offers teachers the opportunity to renew their practice and to understand the effects of their teaching. These insights provide early childhood educators with nuanced understandings to inform their choices for effective pedagogy that is in synchrony with the children in their classroom and how they learn. Child-friendly pedagogies help children to accomplish tasks through collaborative efforts. One of such pedagogies is the instruction through play and game-based activities.



Montessori (1940) observed that children enjoyed play based in reality, and were happier when invited to play with real materials that produced real results, for example, a mop that actually cleans or mouse that works.

Skills development is the process of identifying your skill gaps, developing and honing these skills. Child development is a process every child goes through. This process involves learning and mastering skills like sitting, walking, talking, skipping, and tying shoes. These are things healthy children do quite naturally as they learn and grow. According to De Roode (2010), skills development refers to how a person perceives, thinks, and gains understanding of his or her world through the interaction of genetic and learned factors.

Children develop skills in five main areas; cognitive development, social and emotional development, fine motor skill development, gross motor skill development, and speech and language development. In cognitive development, the child gets the ability to learn and solve problems. In Piaget's theory of cognitive development, he focuses not only on understanding how children acquire knowledge, but also on understanding the nature of intelligence. Piaget believed that in the learning process, children play an active role, acting much like little scientists as they perform experiments, make observations, and learn about the world. As children interact with the world around them, they continually add new knowledge, build upon existing knowledge, and adapt previously held ideas to accommodate new information. Early cognitive development involves processes based upon actions and later progresses to changes in mental operations.

A tremendous amount of social and emotional development takes place during early childhood. Emotion and the social experiences of early life are deeply and enduringly

represented within behavioural development and are “biologically embedded” in the anatomic structure and function of the growing brain (Brodin & Renblad, 2015). Children at this age can be very possessive and have difficulty sharing. Emotional and social skills development is therefore very essential for school readiness. Examples of such abilities include paying attention to adult figures, transitioning easily from one activity to the next, and cooperating with other kids.

De Roode (2010) observed that motor skills generally develop from the centre to the body outward and head to tail. Babies therefore need to practice their skills; they will grow and strengthen better. Development of gross motor skills typically occurs in the large muscles first. These are the muscles of the arms, the legs and the trunk.

Fine motor skill is the coordination of muscles, bones, and nerves to produce small, exact movements. The skills aid in the growth of intelligence and develop continuously throughout the stages of human development. This skill develops after gross motor skills and it requires mastery precision and coordination. Practice they say makes perfection so in developing fine motor skills, the child needs continuous practice to master. Play is therefore very vital when it comes to the development of fine motor skills among children (Brodin & Renblad, 2015).

Speech and language are the skills we use to communicate with others. We form these skills during the first years of life. By age 6, most children learn the basics. It supports children ability to communicate. It also supports their ability to express and understand feelings, think and learn to solve problems. It develops and maintain relationships. In congruence with many researchers, social play including reading aloud and storytelling is one of the most essential ways to stimulate children’s literacy, thus, speech and language development (Brodin & Renblad, 2015). One of

the best-documented methods for improving children's vocabularies is interactive storybook reading between children and their caregivers (O'Connor, 2014).

Play can be a useful tool in fostering social and emotional development in children (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkof, 2011). Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkof (2011) further suggests that "some play opportunities will develop specific individual areas of development, but many will develop several areas. Thus, it is important that practitioners promote children's development through play by using various types of play on a daily basis. Learning through play has been seen regularly in practice as the most versatile way a child can learn. In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play, it's as though he were a head taller than himself' (Vygotsky 1978). A study by the Ohio State University also analysed the effects of implementing board games in elementary classrooms. This study found that implementing board games in the classroom helped students develop social skills that transferred to other areas (Hobart & Khalayi, 2011). Specific outcomes included students being more helpful, cooperative and thoughtful with other students.

The 2007 education reforms in Ghana marked a watershed regarding early childhood education because this government-led policy initiative had a twofold impact on early childhood education delivery in the country: First, the kindergarten aspect of early childhood education became part and parcel of the formal schooling system leading to the development of the early childhood curriculum. Second, the policy brought about the introduction of degree and diploma programme in early childhood education, within some of the universities in Ghana, for the purpose of educating teachers in the content and pedagogy to improve teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. The reforms encouraged the crafting of a philosophy of education for early childhood

education that is based on socio-cultural influences such as traditional knowledge, indigenous pedagogy such as storytelling, traditional songs, traditional rhymes, and proverbs, values, and attitudes as well as the exigencies of the global context. It emphasizes the development of well-balanced individuals and the need for effective teacher practices to promote the holistic development of young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Some educational reforms have promoted the adoption of progressive education practices, a more holistic approach which focuses on individual student's needs and self-control. In the eyes of reformers, traditional teacher-centred methods focused on rote learning and memorization and must be abandoned in favour of student-centred and task-based approaches to learning. Ghana has adopted a new education system that will break the past traditional education system. Curriculum change emerged as key focus in restructuring the educational system and strong emphasis has been placed on effective management and leadership of curriculum; this potentially has brought about many challenges but effective for a learning situation. It is therefore a great step for Ghana to introduce a new curriculum foregoing the old way of teaching, making teaching and learning easier for the child (Kwabia, 2006).

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

This study is modelled on two theories propounded by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development is a comprehensive theory about the nature and development of human intelligence. The theory deals with the nature of knowledge itself and how children gradually come to acquire, construct and use it. Piaget believed that children are not like 'little adults' who may know less. By thinking that children have great cognitive abilities, Piaget came up with four

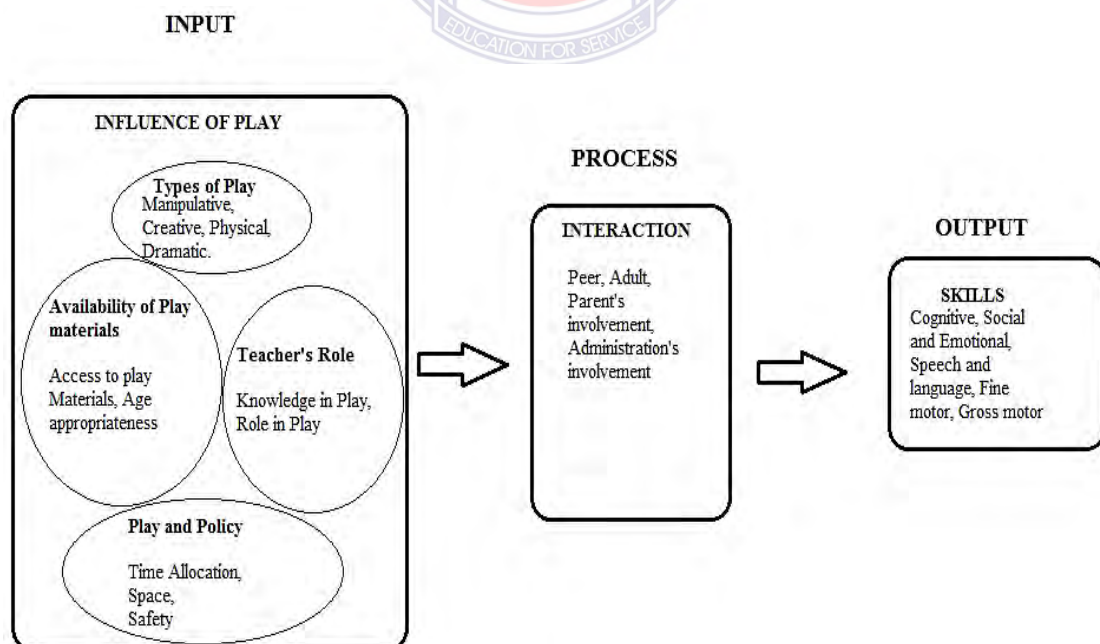
different cognitive development stages, which he put out into testing. He proposed that humans progress through the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and formal operational stage. Within these four stages he managed to group them with different ages. At each stage he realized how children managed to develop their skills. He further explained that children experience the world through actions, representing things with words, thinking logically, and using reasoning. Child-centred classrooms and open education are direct applications of Piaget's views. In spite of the huge success of his theory, one limitation of the theory was that it supports sharp stages rather than continuous development.

Lev Vygotsky's Theory on Social Cognitive is based on the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD). The concept of ZPD was established as a framework to describe the process of self-development as it occurs with the guidance of adults and peers in the learning environment. Vygotsky focused on the role of social interaction in human development and examined the complex relationship between language and thought as well as learning and play. He found out that children's social interactions with significant individuals in their lives profoundly shape their interpretation of the world. As applied to this study the theory holds the idea that child development is because of social interactions between children and their social environment. These interactions involve parents, teachers, playmates, sisters, brothers and other relatives. Vygotsky's research focused on the role of social interaction in human development. It means that the most significant psychological achievement of the early childhood age occurs while children engage in play. According to Vygotsky, play creates a broad zone of proximal development, both in cognitive and socio-emotional development. According to Vygotsky (1978), play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form. Vygotsky theory is relevant as it emphasizes on self-

development of the child through play in a social context. These theories are supported by Frobel (1852), which emphasizes on the need for the child to engage in play with objects. Frobel states that with objects the child will learn the underlying concepts represented by the objects. He not only emphasizes on children playing with objects but also playing outdoors with objects.

#### 1.4 Conceptual Framework

The independent variable in this research is influence of play, which includes types of play, availability of play materials, and teachers' role on play and policy on play. These factors function with the interaction among learner's peers, adults, parents and administration involvement. For the purpose of this study, skills development refers to Cognitive Skills, Social and Emotional Skills, Speech and Language Skills, Fine Motor Skills and Gross Motor Skills. The successful management of games and play in early childhood schools should lead to effective acquisition of these development skills.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

Source: Researcher's Construct

## 1.5 Statement of the Problem

There is a significant difference in the amount of play elementary students, from preschool to kindergarten, are participating in on a daily basis. A preschool classroom from a large school district is required to have approximately two hours and twenty minutes of “free choice centres” and one hour of outdoor “gross motor” play each day, according to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005). Early childhood is the most important period in the skills development of the child. Children through interactions with their parents, siblings, and adults acquire cognitive skills especially by way of imitation through folklore, tongue twisters, riddles and jokes, proverbs among others. Preschool children use games and play to discover their identity, help their bodies grow strong, learn cause and effect, explore relationships and practice skills they will need in future. They provide entertainment while fulfilling educational role. Games and play help in developing the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

However, Harms, Clifford and Cryer (2005) observed that most early grade classrooms do not give the children enough time to play due to some misconceptions about play in early grade classrooms in the Ghanaian society; Play is a waste of time, it has to have a purpose, you need toys to play, creative play is messy, children’s play must be supervised always because they are not safe playing outside unsupervised. Though teachers learn about the benefits of learning through play, they still worry about parental opposition to playtime in the classroom and that playtime will take away from their ability to complete their curriculum. We know that socio-cultural variations in play depend not only upon attitudes of parents, teachers and society in general but also on such variables as the amount of play space and time that is available to children (Roopnarine, Lasker, Sacks & Srores, 1998). In the society we

find ourselves, early childhood teachers are not given the much respect compared to the others because the people take the view that early years' professionals simply play all day and babysit children. When a practitioner is playing with a child, that child is learning. To the untrained eye, a game of tag is just children running riot. But when you look deeper you can see just how much that child is learning from this simple game: spatial awareness, teamwork, taking turns, gross motor skills development, listening to instructions, following rules, experimenting with different ways of moving, finding out about their bodies and what they are capable of achieving.

Low level of knowledge about the use of play in early childhood education warranted the need for this study. The focus is to debunk the myth by bringing to the understanding of Ghanaians why play is crucial at the early years in a child's life or education. The study seeks to answer the question on how important it is to engage early grade children in Effiduase South Circuit in play.

### **1.6 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to explore the impact game and play has on skills development in early childhood education in schools at Effiduase south circuit in the Sekyere East District.

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out teachers' usage of play-based activities in enhancing skills development among pupils in early childhood education in schools at Effiduase South Circuit in the Sekyere East District.
2. To examine the impact of play activities on Cognitive and Motor skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit.



3. To examine the impact of play activities on Social and emotional skills development and Speech and language skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit.

### **1.8 Research Questions**

The researched questions to be addressed by this study are;

1. What play-based activities do teachers use in enhancing skills development among pupils in early childhood education in schools at Effiduase South Circuit in the Sekyere East District?
2. What impact does play have on Cognitive and Motor skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit?
3. What impact does play have on social and emotional skills development and speech and language skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit?

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

The importance of play and the relationships between adults and children during playtime has been mentioned by a lot of studies. In Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Ghana, child-centered education is encouraged by Ministry of Education.

In the current study, it is aimed to explore the impact game and play has on skills development in early childhood. This way, preschool teachers' views about play can be analyzed to understand the current situation. Results of the study may give ideas to administrator of schools, policy makers and designers of preschool teacher education's curriculum to reassess their current policies. Trainings given in-service and pre-service teachers will be reconsidered at the end of the study.

Also with this study, preschool teachers may be aware of the differences –if any, between what they say they do and what they do in reality. At that point, preschool teachers' attention will be taken to their potential roles and what they can do during free playtime. Moreover, the results of the study make contributions to the literature because even though many teachers' perceptions about the play have been investigated, observations regarding their roles during free playtime have not been examined adequately. They will also revise their current practices and change their implications, if they deem necessary.

The third reason of conducting the current study is to demonstrate what preschool teachers do during free playtime or free activity time. It will give information about the difficulties that preschool teachers have in practice, which may draw the attention of authorities and administrators. In-services trainings will be redesigned to broaden preschool teachers' horizons about the importance of play and their practices during free playtime.

The findings will help parents, teachers, and the community at large to understand the use of games and play for a better development in a child. Early playing is found to be associated with higher intelligence later in life. The outcome of the findings will provide early childhood teachers, researchers, and other stakeholders (e.g., curriculum developers) insights into the use of games and play activities in developing gross and fine motor skills, cognitive skills, social and emotional and speech and language skills development. In addition, findings from this study could serve as a guideline to future policy document in the country.

### 1.10 Delimitations

The study covers schools that are in the Effiduase south circuit in the Sekyere East District. Hence, results from this study cannot be generalized to other parts of the nation. The study aimed to determine the impact on a child's skills development. It also focused on the games and play activities to help early grade children to develop holistically.

### 1.11 Definition of Key Terms

<i>Development</i>	The action or process of developing or being developed.
<i>Play</i>	Performing or doing an activity for pleasure enjoyment, or for amusement.
<i>Zone of proximal development</i>	The process of self-development as it occurs with the guidance of adults and peers in the learning environment.
<i>Cognitive development</i>	How children think, explore and figure things out
<i>Social and emotional development</i>	It is a process through which children acquire the capacity to understand, experience, express and manage emotions and relate with others.
<i>Fine motor skill development</i>	The coordination of small muscles in movement involving hands, fingers and eyes
<i>Gross motor skill development</i>	The movement of large muscles of the arm, legs and torso.
<i>Speech and language development</i>	The skills we use to communicate with others.

*Language skills*

Language abilities the child acquire in order to communicate

*Language Acquisition*

Process by which children acquire the capacity to perceive, produce and use words to understand and communicate.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the concept of play, types of play, availability of play materials, age-appropriate play materials, attitude of teachers towards play, teachers' role in play, and school policy on play, conceptual, theoretical and empirical works that have been done both in Ghana and abroad on the study.

#### **2.2 Conceptual Review**

Play is one of the most relevant ways through which children learn. Play based teaching and learning promotes positive social skills in young children. In Ghana, many children are not given time to play and teachers do not integrate play as a school-based policy as stipulated in the curriculum yet the entire teaching and learning of young children is entirely based on play. Broncher and Joyes (2003), note that currently in the UK, the government has been taking keen interest in developing the standard of the children studying in pre-schools by providing relevant facilities and play materials that enhance holistic development of the learners (Aliza & Rahety 2011). They believe that children are playful by nature. Play is part of children's behaviour embedded in day-to-day activities. It forms an important part of pre-school and out of school early learning. Play is important to healthy brain development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Article 31 of the UN Convention states that every child has the right to rest, leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts. The article also

states that member governments shall respect and promote the rights of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Kontos (2004) proposed that children in school should construct their own knowledge and insisted on integration of relevant play activities in teaching and learning that is conducted in a relevant learning environment that is ideal for young children. The study noted that, when relevant play activities go along with relevant learning environment, higher learning results are yielded in children. In the article, play as a curriculum, (Kananu, 2005), claims that, in most East Africa countries, children play progresses through various stages and levels of complexity. When deprived of play, the child is a prisoner shut off from all that makes life real and meaningful. The impulse to create and achieve, working through play allows the child to grow in body and mind.

Play helps to enhance a child's readiness for more formalised learning. Through play in early childhood, a child strengthens his or her skills development. It presents a child with many opportunities for oral communication and expression of the skills. This early skills development will in turn help children as they later learn to read and write. Coolahan, (2000) states that play is integral to the academic environment. It ensures that school setting attends to the social and emotional development of the children as well as their cognitive development.

Play has been shown to help and motivate children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children learning readiness, learning behaviours and problem-solving skills. Play and unscheduled time that allows for peer interaction are important

components of socio-emotional learning. Play that involves language activities plays an important role in the development of child's vocabulary, listening skills and communication skills. Therefore, play materials are integral component of learning process hence their adequacy, sustainability is important (Boreham & Riddoch, 2001). The relationship between play and learning is complex, reciprocal and multidimensional. The process of play and learning stimulate one another in early childhood. There are dimensions of learning in play and dimensions of play in learning. Play and learning are inseparable dimensions in pre-school practice. Subsequently, this study intends to establish the effects of play on the development of pre-schoolers' skills development in Early Childhood Schools in Effiduase.

### **2.3.1 Teachers' Usage of Play-based Activities in Enhancing Skills**

#### **Development in Early Childhood Education**

### **2.3.1 Types of play and skills development**

The playtime activities children engage in vary based on their motivation levels. Play fosters children cognitive growth. According to Tassoni and Bath (2000), as children grow, they develop their social skills since they are capable of playing together in a social manner. The social play that children engage in can be classified into four stages. There is the solitary play stage that involves children between one to two years old. At this stage, children play alone but seek reassurance from adults. They tend to develop independency because they want to do things alone. Parallel play stage involves two years olds where they meet other children for the first time. They play alongside others even without communicating. Cooperative or group play stage is between 3 years and above. They play actively with others, they talk and decide about play, they share and make their own rules. Exploratory play, which is sometimes, called unoccupied play where a child randomly interacts with things and people

around them. The adult may not be able to tell whether the child has a purpose to this play or not. Plays of different forms in children enhance skills development (Tassoni & Bath, 2000).

### ***2.3.1.1 Manipulative play and skills development***

Manipulative play involves the use of hands and legs and all body parts. This kind of play develops hand-eye coordination in children as they interact and manipulate play materials. The manipulative area should therefore, consist of relatively small materials like balls, ropes, clay, blocks, beads, brushes, paints in addition to swings that can be used for both indoor and outdoor play activities respectively. In writing readiness, the child learns how to paint, draw and colour pictures, write letters, scribble, write patterns, draw and model (Russ, 2014). Reading readiness involves looking at and differentiating details in pictures and objects and moving eyes according to the accepted reading style from left to right. Manipulation of play materials enhances the development of gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination. As they hold play materials during play, get ready to hold writing tools with a fist or finger grasp and draws with a variety of items like crayons, pens, and pencils, make marks and scribbles. This is developed through their muscles during manipulative play. Work in this area; primarily enhances their fine motor skills and spatial awareness. The items to be manipulated should vary depending on the age, interests and needs of the children in the pre-school centre. It is therefore important to maintain a wide range of play materials (Tassoni & Bath, 2000).

### ***2.3.1.2 Creative play and development of skills***

Creative processes modelled in creative play include divergent thinking, broad associations, cognitive flexibility, problem solving, imagination, improvisation,



pleasure and absorption (Vygotsky, 1976). Many early learning and childcare programmes take learning through play approach and ensure that there are large blocks of time each day when children choose an activity from a number of activities selected by the educator. By allowing children to select their own learning activities, they become the leader of their own learning (Russ, 2014).

Imagination is very important compared to knowledge. Through play, children learn that their personal gratification is often dependent on their cooperation and creativity with other children. Play teaches children about partnership, teamwork and fair play. In creative play, learners use art materials such as paint, clay markers, pencil, and glue.

Games that require interaction with other learners are a great way to develop interaction with other people. Expression of thought and articulation in conversation are some of the speaking skills that are developed. In developing reading skills, children require to read the instruction provided so that they could proceed through the next level. These games are not only essential in developing vocabulary but also empower children to develop reading comprehension.

### ***2.3.1.3 Dramatic play or role-play and development of skills***

This kind of play involves acting out roles and situations. Many young children spend a lot of time engaged in imaginative play by themselves throughout the early childhood years. They invent scripts and play many roles simultaneously. Toys, dolls, cars and action figures usually support this kind of play. As children grow old, they create entire world in solitary pretence, often with large collections of small objects or miniature figures. This kind of play fosters skills development as children express

their emotions, feelings, fears and aspirations through dramatic play. This play also fosters sharing, self-confidence, problem solving, cooperation and conflict resolution.

Dramatic play promotes the use of speaking and listening skills. When children take part in the play, they practice words they have heard others say and realise that they must listen to what other players say in order to respond in an appropriate manner. It teaches children to choose their words wisely, so that others will understand exactly what it is they are trying to communicate. Engaging in social play requires not only to regulate own thinking and behaviour but to understand and regulate co-players thinking to maintain the collaborative situation (Whitebread, 2017). As they play, children learn to follow instructions and directions, and take turns. This play helps children feel proud of what they can do hence they develop a sense of who they are. The opportunity for dramatic play is a way for children to explore the meaning of the activities they see in grown-up world. Here they learn to interact with others and they gain a sense of competence. The children are immersed in social talk that includes greetings, goodbyes, chatting and jokes. Daily activities like tidying up, story time, and telling teachers and parents about their personal experiences, are opportunities for children to use their listening and speaking skills in a meaningful way. Moreover, it enhances the child's needs to organise a complex environment into meaningful scripts, encourages children to plan, communicate their plans and courses of action, stimulates children to listen, speak, think creatively and predicts later creativity. Therefore, this study seeks to establish the influence of play on pre-schoolers' skills development in Public schools in Effiduase.

#### ***2.3.1.4 Physical play and skills development***

Despite the known benefits of play, there is evidence to suggest less of children's time is being devoted to play in favour of structured education activities (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000). Appropriate toys and materials encourage children to build muscle and strength. Children gain practice and gain confidence as they manipulate play materials. Toys, swings, balls and ladders for climbing help children to explore in many different ways, build eye-hand coordination and encourage children to think about how things work. Some of these items like ladders swings and balls promote balance and body awareness. These play materials that promote active physical learning motivate children to pursue their own ideas and interest enthusiastically. During this kind of play, the children are able to develop listening and speaking skills as they coordinate, give instructions, listen and follow rules during play. Children gain practice and have confidence as they manipulate materials. Hobart and Frankel (2009) confirm that play is a way through which children expend on excess energy and maintains physical fitness.

Some items also promote balance and body awareness. In this type, children use the whole body in activities with bicycle, balls and ropes to build their muscles, and to enhance or develop their muscles and motor skills.

#### **2.3.2 Availability of play materials and skills development**

Play facilities and materials in children's play add value. Children learn best when they are part of a secure and stimulating environment full of materials for manipulation. Teachers, parents and school administrators are expected to provide play materials to the children to help them engage in meaningful play that will influence the development of skills. Play helps children learn language because it

incorporates many of the socially interactive and cognitive elements known to enhance skills development (Woolkolf, 2004).

Play materials range from balls, ropes, dolls, swings, clay, blocks, beads and ladders. According to National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) parents should provide security and protection, stimulation, socialization, play and learning materials. Interactive display and availability of play materials in schools, thematic collections of carefully selected materials entice pre-school children to explore a wide range of ideas. Children are active learners and if they are to develop the skills and competence, they must be able to work and access play materials. Play is important for skills development because when they are in control of an interaction, they are engaged; they speak about and listen to what interest them. Teachers and parents are required to provide playing materials for their children so as to help them get engaged in a meaningful and quality play which influences their social and emotional development (Jane, 2001). However, his study did not address effect of play materials on the development of skills; hence, this study wants to fill this gap. The materials should be organised in such a way that opportunities for learning and discovery that enhance the development of skills, are maximised.

The anticipation, preparation and instruction from teachers before and after play provide opportunities for listening and use of new vocabularies relevant for that time. Other listening skills that develop during play include giving clear, simple instruction for everyday tasks, being a good listener, praising and playing listening games. All these activities are aimed at helping the children acquire listening skills that are vital for learning and acquiring language skills. Language skills are primarily avenues for cognitive development because they allow children to talk about their experiences and

discoveries. With the availability of play materials children learn words used to describe concepts and words that let them talk about activities and events in the field.

The priority currently given to the early acquisition of academic skills is another threat to children's play. These emphases always constrain and limit the scope of learning that unfolds naturally in play. Children need time, space, materials and support of informed parents and thoughtful skilled early childhood educators in order to become master players. A study by Kananu (2005), found a strong relation between resource availability and effective use as related to academic achievement. She noted that physical facilities, teaching, learning, and play materials are important determinants of pre-school performance in the learning of all subject areas. The importance of play in a child is grounded in Vygotsky theory that children learn at the time they play. Play, according to Vygotsky (1978), contains rules for behaviour that the child should follow to be successful in play situation. Proper materials engage children in a wide range of play, alone and with others. The curriculum and play materials and activities should be based on the children's interest, age and skill level. The teachers should provide a variety of activities for different age groups that focus on language and speech, social development, time and cognitive development and gross motor skills.

The teacher is the facilitator of play by working with children to develop rules for appropriate indoor and outdoor play environment. The issue about the appropriate use of materials, age and developmental levels must be carefully considered in design and selection of materials. The quantity, quality and selection of play materials influence the interactions that take place between children, thus these materials provided to children should be age appropriate and flexible to the children. Flexibility allows the

teacher to maximise on the space for integration of learning activities such as dancing, dramatization, skipping, jumping and hide-seek.

According to Khoima (2006), skills development begins with cooing games and evolves to sophisticated levels such as telling stories and jokes where children develop their language. Safety of equipment encourages children to use their imagination and learn to cooperate. A facility like the playground maximises opportunities to engage in greater amount of play with peers. The interaction with their peers allows children to express ideas and feelings and develop language and speech, social development, cognitive development and gross motor skills.

According to Brooks and Atkins (2002), an aspect of school management that is generally overlooked is the physical facilities maintenance. Brooks and Atkins (2002) noted that school managers and teachers constantly use play facilities but ignored facilities maintenance. Repairs take place only when problems arise. Guidelines and rules should be put in place to be followed by both teachers and children on use of play materials. Teachers need to facilitate play by working with children to develop rules for safe indoor and outdoor play. No matter how careful the child, teacher and administrators are to follow rules, sometimes children are bound to get hurt. According Kombo and Tromp (2006), adult supervision can help prevent injuries by ensuring children safely use the play materials and engage in safe play. The playground should be designed in a way that from whichever position the children and adults are where they can clearly see each other while playing. This can help reduce injuries or accidents that are bound to happen during play. The playground should be free from stagnant water, sharp objects and stones to allow relaxed movement of children during play. For children to reach their potential, they should

feel comfortable in a safe context of the world around them (Kananu, 2005). Safety measures will ensure effective use and manipulation of play materials that will enhance development of fine and gross motor skills and the development of writing skills in language.

### **2.3.3 Teachers' role in play and development skills**

To provide quality education, the teacher must have attained a given level of education relevant to the task and be properly trained. The success of any literacy programme is largely dependent on the type of teacher's performance in that field. Each teacher should recognize the value of play in the programmes for young children. Unfortunately, teachers often fail to take advantage of the opportunities play provides for children's development and learning. Through observation, teachers can learn about children's social interactions, cognitive and language abilities, motor skills and emotional development. Adult supervision can help prevent injuries by making sure kids use the playground equipment properly and do not engage in unsafe activities around.

This safe environment will encourage children to use freely the play materials and facilitate the development of language and speech, social development, fine and gross motor skills and cognitive development. Ziegler (2006) noted that skilled teachers, who are well trained in observing children, must consciously facilitate play and understand how play contributes to the child's mastery of concepts. The teacher should organize activities and materials that promote skills development for use throughout the indoor and outdoor daily schedules. Children learn through interactions with materials and people, both peers and adults in the context of play

and daily routines. The teacher should have a daily schedule, which is essential to the basic structure of each day.

Consistency enables children to feel secure, giving them confidence and freedom to explore the environment. The daily schedule is to make the teacher be a keen observer of children's characteristic and behaviour. The teacher should therefore keep brief and accurate records of children's interests, abilities and emotional aspects and use them for noting improvement. Some specialists in play activities argue that the ever-increasing amount of knowledge and skills needed by young children through play require teachers' guidance or direct instruction to specific learning goals and objectives (Lillemyr & Fredrick, 2003).

Teachers have a variety of roles in supporting integration of children's play in ECE curriculum (Guffin & Wilson, 2003). These roles include providing materials for play, encouraging high quality play, structuring environments for play, modelling play and introducing children to new play opportunities. During planning and preparation, the teachers can arrange for physical places suitable for different types of play, find and provide accessories for play (dress props) and decide how play periods can fit into the daily routines and schedules of the school and class. Teachers in ECE programmes are facilitators who need to engage children in multiple experiences to foster their all-around development. They need to observe children to identify their needs and capabilities and move with their pace of development. They need to create a nurturing and positive relationship with children and among children. Play appears to be the source and motivator for eagerness to learn and think creatively. The teacher should facilitate the transition process of moving from one activity to another, which is often difficult for young children (Lillemyr & Fredrick, 2003).



The teacher must prepare and point children for change of activities. They need to use attention getters like signals, songs, finger play, rhymes, games and puppets to signal change. These activities promote language and speech, social development, time and cognitive development and gross motor skills. Teachers who use transition activities will have calm and organised classrooms and environments with happy cooperative children during play. The environment of play and the attitude of the supporting teacher towards play shape the quality of the play experience for children. One of the most important attitudes and roles of the teacher is facilitation of play. The teacher should set this stage, creating and maintaining an environment conducive for rich, spontaneous play and interactions in ways that enhance children's skills, without interrupting the flow and direction of play (Guffin & Wilson, 2003).

Play is a valid learning experience in and of itself albeit one that has been difficult to justify and sustain in formal education settings. Creating environments where children can learn through play is not a simple thing to do consistently and well. It needs one with a positive attitude towards the tasks and one who joins and enjoys with the children in their play for the children to learn. The role of the teacher is critical for the children to become skilled at play; they need uninterrupted time and knowledgeable teachers who pay attention to support the right to play. Teachers' perception to use of play-based approach provides learning benefits to children. Their perception of play impacts children's learning experiences (Guffin & Wilson, 2003).

It is appropriate for pre-school teachers to understand the appropriate teaching approach such as learning through play and its role in early childhood development. Play activities give children opportunities to learn other skills from their peers and practice what they have learnt in different situation. Despite the fact that teachers may

assign time for play in their lesson plans, their attitude towards playtime may not be routinely built into the programme because teachers generally hold diverse viewpoints about teaching, one that is child-centred and one that is teacher-directed (Lillemyr & Fredrick, 2003). Most often ECE teachers may set up appropriate stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not follow up with guidance, scaffolding or supportive and responsive interactions with children as they play. In an article reviewing the clinical and psychological effects of excessive screen time on children, Domingues-Montanari (2017) stated that the cognitive developmental benefits of television have been shown to increase when television programs are co-viewed with an adult.

#### **2.4 Impact of play activities on Social and emotional skills development and Speech and language skills development at early childhood centres**

A broad definition of skills involves the social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural skills a child needs to develop in order to be successful in life. These skills include sending and receiving affective messages, perspective taking, processing skills, conversational skills, and pro-social behaviour (Semrud-Clikeman, (2007). Regardless of how it is defined, skills development is a useful concept for understanding how children adjust socially and emotionally to their environments. Lindsey and Colwell (2013) identified ways in which play contributes to the development of skills. Building on the work of developmental theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, they hypothesised that children who participate in pretend play have more opportunities to practice perspective-taking and can better understand the emotions of others. In other words, children who have ample time for play learn to send and receive affective messages and experience affect.

Lindsey and Colwell (2013) conducted a two-year study of 122 preschool-age children (57 boys, 65 girls; from mostly middle- and upper-middle class families) to ascertain how different types of play affect children's skills. Researchers collected data in a number of ways: naturalistic observations to observe children's play behaviour; interviews with the children to determine emotional knowledge; and questionnaires filled out by parents to determine emotion regulation. Researchers videotaped children during naturally occurring play and coded the play behaviour based on social involvement and form of play.

Proportion scores were created for each child based on time spent in social, interactive play with peers, and the type of play involved in. Each child was given a score for emotional expressiveness, both positive (happiness, excitement, or joy) and negative (frustration, anger, or sadness), based on the duration and intensity of emotion displayed during the observations. They were also scored on emotion knowledge (ability to identify feelings of others), using interviews conducted with the children where they were presented with photos of various expressions and asked to identify them correctly, and emotion regulation (emotional intensity, and mood changes, as reported by mothers) which was used to rate their skills level. Using regression analyses, the data, collected over a period of two years, showed a correlation between emotion knowledge, emotion regulation, and emotion expression and skills development. The researchers found that engaging in pretend play, especially sociodramatic play, increases a child's skills development. The authors suggest that sociodramatic play has an advantage over other types of pretend play, such as fantasy play, because during sociodramatic play children often take on other roles, and can practice imagining and acting out the emotions of another person. The children practice expressing emotions they may not be feeling in order to play the part, which

also requires emotional regulation. In contrast, fantasy play allows children to be themselves, but they are using objects in place of other objects (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013). The children in this study all attended the same child care facility.

The teachers all had the same views on play, and the toys available were similar for all students, therefore the children were all likely to interact in similar ways with each other and their play environments. Future research is warranted in a broader context with children who may not have had the same play experiences. In contrast to Lindsey and Colwell's findings, Veiga, de Leng, Cachucho, Ketelaar, Kok, Knobbe, Neto and Rieffe, (2016) conducted a study of 73 Portuguese pre-schoolers (44 boys, 29 girls) in order to determine whether one type of play is more important than others in developing social competence. Veiga et al. (2016) recorded children's play for three minutes at a time. The recordings were coded by type of activity, for example talking, or play. Then the play was subcategorised into one of five types:

1. Fantasy play: the child is using pretend objects symbolically as other things.
2. Role play: the child is assuming a symbolic role.
3. Exercise play: the child is jumping or running.
4. Rough-and-tumble play: the child is engaged in an activity which appears to be aggressive, but is done in a playful manner.
5. Other: the child is engaging in an activity that does not fit in the above, for example, constructing a model (Veiga et al., 2016).

Children also wore radio-frequency identification devices (RFID) to aid researcher's in identifying the number of interactions each child had, the number of children per interaction, and how long each interaction lasted. Teachers rated children's skills development on a 3-point Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

The authors found that children who spent more time interacting in social groups within their free play activities were rated by their teachers as more socially competent than those who spent time playing alone. These are children who seem better able to sustain positive peer relationships and engage in positive social exchanges, even when the play is considered rough-and-tumble. They also found that the quality of peer interactions (defined as prolonged interactions with smaller groups of peers) and the time spent in free play are more important to the development of skills development than any one type of play. A high correlation was found between children who scored higher on the SDQ and those who spent time in positive peer interactions.

Therefore, they conclude that the play environment and quality of the play interactions have a greater effect on social outcomes than any one type of play. They recommend that the importance of free, unstructured play time not be overlooked in this era of replacing play with academics (Veiga et al., 2016).

This study was limited to social play on the playground. The choices children are given and physical environment during recess times often lead to more physical play or rough and tumble behaviours. The RFID data could be collected in the classroom just as easily, and would help researchers gather a bigger picture idea of how many children are playing together and in what capacity. In addition, they did not look at negative peer interactions. If quality interactions are defined as being prolonged, it would seem that some negative interactions would take place in that time. Further research is needed to see how the children handled those negative interactions. Eggum-Wilkens, Fabes, Castle, Zhang, Hanish and Martin, (2014) developed a study

to determine the effect of Head Start children's peer play on school readiness in relation to social and academic competence and skills development.

They believed that children who began kindergarten with higher level peer play skills would make the kindergarten transition more easily due to better kindergarten competence acquired through the peer play. Participants included 264 Head Start pre-schoolers from 18 different classrooms in seven schools. Observations of children at play were taken throughout the school year, both indoors and outdoors. Coders observed children according to a randomly generated list, for 10-second intervals, noting the nature of each child's play before moving to the next child on the list. Peer play was classified as play involving verbal or physical activity in close proximity to another child, either positive or negative in nature. The total number of peer play observations per child was divided by the total number of observations for that child to calculate the proportion of peer play for each child. When the children began kindergarten, their teachers completed the Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment (TRSSA), which showed researchers how children were adapting to kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers also completed the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS), which assesses children on play interaction, disruptive behaviours, and nonparticipation in play.

As predicted, children who exhibited higher levels of peer play (as measured by PIPPS) in Head Start were rated as more school-ready by their kindergarten teachers. These children were better able to follow directions, self-regulate, and cooperate, and they were better prepared for the academic rigors of kindergarten. The authors suggest that because children practice these development skills during peer play, they are learning, through play, how to behave and learn in a way that is socially and

academically acceptable to their kindergarten teachers (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014). This study was exclusive to the children's Head Start and kindergarten years. The authors do not know which children had prior formal schooling, which could have influenced their peer play abilities.

Li, Hestenes, and Wang (2016) studied the relationship between children's pretend play and the development of skills. They chose to observe children at play outdoors because of the lack of research available on children's play in outdoor settings. Participants in this study were from three child care centres in the same US city; there were a total of 28 children from four different classrooms. Children were observed in 20-second intervals, (10 seconds to observe and 10 seconds to record) with the intention of capturing pretend play frequency and type, teacher interaction, and children's verbalisations. Each child was recorded for three minutes at a time. Over a period of six days at each site, researchers collected two waves of data per child, per day. Play was coded by type: abstract, meaning children were using only their imaginations; or concrete, meaning children were using objects to represent other objects. Play was also coded as social (playing with peers), or solitary (playing alone). The Social Skill Rating System (SSRS), a teacher-completed report, was used to measure cooperating skills (helping others and sharing), self-control (takings turns and compromising), and assertion (initiating play, asking for help, responding to others).

Researchers found that both social and abstract pretend play positively correlated with an overall higher SSRS score, leading the authors to suggest that these types of play are important in the development of social and cognitive skills. They recommend that parents and teachers actively promote and extend social pretend play activities to

build these important skills (Li, Hestenes, & Wang, 2016). The authors note that this study only looked at play behaviours on the playground. The benefits of social pretend play will extend into the classroom if teachers consciously promote pretend play during the school day.

## **2.5 Impact of Play Activities on Cognitive and Motor Skills Development at Early Childhood Centres**

Ramani (2012) examined how play fosters problem solving skills in preschool children by comparing children's behaviour and task performance in two laboratory settings: a child-centred, playful setting, and a structured, adult-driven setting. The prediction was that children engaged in the playful, child-directed task would demonstrate higher levels of communication skills and task performance, and better cooperative problem-solving skills than the children who completed the adult-directed task. A total of 76 four and five-year-old children from university-affiliated child care centres were the participants in this study, however data was collected in a laboratory setting, not in the classroom. Children were paired with a familiar peer of the same age and gender whom they had known for at least one month. Children who were reported by their teachers to be best friends or to not get along were not paired. Within one week, each pair was observed on two separate days.

On the first day each pair was asked to complete a baseline building task (a house with four walls, a door, and two rooms) to ensure the conditions were the same. Children were free to build the house however they pleased within those characteristics. On the second day, pairs were read a story about cooperation, and then randomly assigned either a building task that involved informal play and was child-driven, or an adult-structured and directed building task. All pairs used the same



blocks, and tasks were video recorded. In both conditions, the children were given ten minutes to complete their task. In the playful condition, children were asked to pretend to be the children in the story, and build a structure to play in. They were given suggestions for tall walls, rooms, a door, and a strong outside, just the in the story, however the children were free to play pretend as they built, could choose how to make the structure, and could choose when they were finished. In the adult-directed condition children were told to build a playhouse just like the one in the story, how to complete it, what it should look like, and how much time they had. They were not allowed to play or pretend. Pictures were taken of all completed structures. Building complexity and completeness was coded based on the pictures taken, and based on height and length, colours, intricacy of design, and use of bridges.

Cooperative behaviour and communication were coded from videotapes based on the following: cooperative interaction (asking questions, explaining, directing, and demonstrating); joint communication (suggestions to peers, narration of activities, and agreements); and shared task responsibility (organizing behaviours and actions, dividing labour, and negotiating). Unproductive behaviour was measured by disagreements, controlling peer, and verbalisations to the researcher (Ramani, 2012).

In the areas of cooperative behaviour and communication, children in the playful condition had a greater proportion of positive joint communication than the children in the adult-directed groups, however the differences in cooperative behaviour were not statistically significant. The children in the playful condition also built more complex and complete structures than the children in the adult-directed groups. The author suggests that the children in the playful condition were able to build more elaborate structures because of their higher-level communication skills. The children's

ability to make suggestions, mutually agree on the design, and narrate the play aided in the overall performance of the building task. The author also suggests that because the playful condition was child-directed the children were able to create their own shared goals and strategies to complete them, just as they do during pretend play. This shared task responsibility gave the children ownership of their play and the structure they built. In the adult-driven condition, however, there was no room for play, and no room for shared goals or strategy; the children were told what to build and how to build it. The decrease in freedom led to a decrease in interest and performance (Ramani, 2012). This study supports the belief that preschool children learn important social, problem solving, and communication skills through play. It should be noted, however, that all the children in this study attended child care centres that promoted social play and cooperation, and were familiar with how to work cooperatively.

Also, the children in the playful condition were allowed to play, however they were not observed in a natural play setting. The Learn to Play programme is a child-led play intervention used to develop pretend play skills in children. Stagnitti, O'Connor, and Sheppard (2012) studied 19 children ages 5-6 years old in a specialist school in Victoria, Canada to determine how effective a play-based intervention can be in boosting children's affective social competence and skills. The children were all in their first year in the specialist school and all had an intellectual disability, as diagnosed by an educational psychologist. Ten of the 19 children were diagnosed with autism. Others had behavioural needs or decreased social skills. Because pretend play is linked to the development of affective social competence skills such as cooperation and responding to others' needs, the researchers decided that a play intervention was the best tool for building those skills lacking in the children in the study. Baseline data was collected using the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS) on each child in the

study to assess peer play competencies. PIPPS has three subscales: Social Interaction (cooperation and helpfulness);

Social Disruption (aggression); and Social Disconnection (withdrawal and nonparticipation in peer play). The Child-Initiated Pretend Play Assessment (ChIPPA) was also administered to measure children's quality of pretend play and the ability to initiate play. The Preschool Language Scale (PLS) was used to assess expressive and receptive communication skills. Follow up data was collected after the six-month intervention using PIPPS, ChIPPA, and PLS. Children were placed into small groups of four to seven children with two adults per group. Twice each week for a six-month period children participated in one-hour play sessions. During each play session the children started in a large group with a video of that day's play scripts. There were four play stations, however the small groups only played at one per day. The stations included: doll play (caring for dolls, including doctor play to "save" the babies); transport play (train tracks and roads, cars, trucks, and trains); construction play (building with blocks, human and animal figures, zoo, farm, home, and fire station play); and a home corner (cooking, cleaning, shopping, parties). The children acted out play scripts during the one-hour sessions, with photos being taken to review with the children as a large group language experience after each session. The photos were used as prompts throughout the week during play time to remind the children how to play independently (Stagnitti, O'Connor, & Sheppard, 2012).

Researchers examined the relationship between variables at baseline and follow up to determine the change in social competence and language over the course of the six months. As expected, once the children were taught how to play, their social skills were strengthened and researchers saw a decrease in social disconnection. In addition,

language abilities increased when children were taught to play. The authors suggest that play provides an important context for children to learn and practice their skills, and that this intervention works because it is child-led; the children are engaged in meaningful play with peers (Stagnitti, O'Connor, & Sheppard, 2012). This study was carried out in a school for developmentally disabled children. This research would be beneficial to carry out in a regular education setting in order to determine if the same results would be found for typically-developing children.

Research supports the need for play to promote growth in affective social competence and peer relations. The development of these positive social skills has another benefit; when children learn to self-regulate, disruptive behaviours in the classroom appear to decrease. Veiga, et al, (2016) tested the theory that children's social competence and emotional functioning is directly related to having ample time for active engagement in free play. Researchers tested 78 Portuguese children between the ages of four and six, and gathered questionnaire data from their parents about their free play habits at home. Children were tested on a variety of tasks, including Theory of Mind, which was tested through a desire task and two false belief tasks; Emotional Discrimination, in which children were asked to identify facial expressions; and Emotional Attribution, in which stories were told and children were asked to identify how the character would feel. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was filled out by parents and used to measure behaviour problems (fighting, hyperactivity) and prosocial behaviours.

A Free Play Report, Empathy Questionnaire, and Social Functioning Report were submitted by the parents. The authors found that more exposure to free play during the preschool years, as measured by the Free Play Report, in which parents reported

their children's time spent in free play both during the week and on the weekends, is positively associated with theory of mind, emotion attribution, social competence, and emotion discrimination. They suggest that free play is associated with less disruptive behaviour, as measured by the SDQ, possibly because through free play children are able to safely explore ways to express socially unacceptable impulses in more desirable ways. In addition, the authors suggest that during free play children are given opportunities to solve problems for themselves, negotiate with peers, and practice perspective-taking roles. It is interesting to note that solitary free play is not positively associated with social competence.

The authors suggest that the negative association between solitary free play and social competence is because critical social skills cannot be practiced when playing alone. Because this study involved children from only one school, and they interacted with their parents instead of their peers, the results are not generalisable. The children all had the same opportunities for free play while at school, and therefore were able to participate in peer play at the start of the study. Further research is needed in a broader setting focusing on peer interactions.

In order to observe how pretend play positively affects social competence, Fung and Cheng (2017) studied the effect of pretend-play therapy on 60 Chinese pre-schoolers. Using observations, parent questionnaires, and the Peer Interactive Play Rating Scales (PIPRS) Fung and Cheng assessed the children's social competence before and after the play training sessions, which lasted one month. Children who did not participate in the play training sessions spent the time in a non-pretend play activity, such as art.

The play training sessions took place in the dramatic play area of the room, where children were encouraged to take on pretend roles, and use the materials provided in

accordance with a particular theme, for example, Hair Salon. The teachers did not participate in the play, except when necessary for redirection or behaviour problems (Fung & Cheng, 2017). They discovered that after the play training, girls tended to be less disruptive than their peers who participated in non-pretend play; however, boys in both groups were similarly disruptive after the training (Fung & Cheng, 2017).

Researchers conclude that the link between pretend play and social competence is strong enough to warrant future research, and to recommend that teachers continue to allow ample time for free play. They suggest that because social competence is such an important skill for young children to develop, the need for play must not be ignored (Fung & Cheng, 2017).

This research supports the need for ample time for free play so that children can develop self-regulation skills and social competence, and thereby decrease disruptive behaviours. It stands to reason, then, that when children are less disruptive and better able to manage their emotions, they would be better able to learn. Much research has been done on just that subject. This study had a small sample size of children from one school, in Hong Kong. Further research is needed here in the United States to see if the findings hold true for all children. The results support the continued existence of free play in all early childhood classrooms, regardless of the part of the world the children call home. Bulotsky-Shearer, Bell, Carter, and Dietrich (2014) looked at the relationship between interactive peer play and academic skills. They predicted that there would be a positive correlation between cooperative peer interactions and preschool academic achievement. They also predicted that children who had negative interactions with peers or exhibited disruptive behaviours would have negative learning outcomes. The authors wanted to examine whether high-quality classroom

environments that support the development of both social and academic skills through developmentally appropriate play-based curriculums would buffer the academic and social risks associated with disruptive behaviour.

A random sample of 922 Head Start enrolled children was chosen from 53 classrooms in eight urban Head Start centres in the US. Teachers assessed the children's peer play using PIPPS at the beginning of the school year. PIPPS was used to measure play disruption, play interaction, and play disconnection. During the winter, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was given in each of the classrooms. CLASS is an observational assessment used to measure the quality of interactions between teachers and children. There are three domains: Emotional Support (positive and negative climate, teacher sensitivity and regard for student perspective);

1. Classroom Organization (behaviour management, productivity, learning formats); and Instructional Support (concept development, language modelling, and quality of feedback). At the end of the school year children were assessed in Letter-Word Identification and Picture.
2. Vocabulary using the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ-III). The Letter-Word Identification subtest assessed children's ability to recognize letters and words, and to pronounce words correctly, and the Picture Vocabulary subtest measured receptive vocabulary skills.

The authors found that pre-schoolers who exhibited higher levels of disruptive play early in the school year had lower literacy skills at the end of the year. They also found that classrooms with high-quality teacher-student interactions and high levels of emotional support were positively associated with interactive peer play and academic readiness. The higher the quality of the classroom, the more academically and socially

advanced the children were at the end of the year. The authors recommend integrating activities within the classroom routine that promote positive peer interactions, and increasing child-directed learning experiences with peers.

This study did not assess children's academic skills at the beginning of the year, therefore there is not a baseline for academic growth, only a snapshot of the level of skill at the end of the preschool year. A child's preschool vocabulary is a strong predictor of future reading success. Unfortunately, many children, particularly children from low-income homes, start school with a significant vocabulary deficit (Hart & Risley, 1995). Early childhood educators know that early language exposure is critical to building vocabulary, and also that vocabulary mastery is an important component of future academic success in literacy. When children start school with poor vocabularies, they are already at a disadvantage compared to their peers who have had those early language and literacy experiences. Han, Moore, Vukelich, and Buell (2010) set out to explore the best way to make up for those lost experiences in children who come to school at a disadvantage.

Proponents of play-based early childhood curriculum argue that children learn best in a developmentally appropriate programme that addresses all their needs: cognitive, language, literacy, and social. To support this claim, and to investigate the growth children make in social and language skills over a six-month period, Reynolds, Stagnitti, and Kidd (2011) studied two primary schools in Victoria, Australia serving children ages four to six years. School 1 was a Reggio Emilia-style school with a play-based curriculum. Activities were based on student interests and teachers' moulded student learning based on children's needs and interest level.



School 2 was a traditionally structured school with an academic-focus. Teachers set aside blocks of time each day for direct instruction in literacy. Researchers measured the children's ability to engage in pretend play using the Child-Initiated Pretend Play Assessment (ChIPPA); measured oral language with the School Age Oral Language Assessment (SAOLA); and measured social competence with the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS). (It should be noted that in order to avoid bias, a speech pathologist who was blind to the study goals and the children scored the baseline and follow-up assessments in the narrative language section of the (SAOLA.) At baseline assessment the two groups of children showed no significant differences in any assessment measures. However, at the six-month follow-up, children in the play-based school programme showed significant increases in language abilities over their peers in the traditionally structured school, related to increases in symbolic play as measured by the ChIPP A. The children in the play-based school also had higher rates of growth in narrative language skills, again explained by their increased ability to extend pretend play, as measured by the ChIPPA (Reynolds, Stagnitti, & Kidd, 2001). The researchers of this study concluded that emergent literacy skills are positively affected through play.

The authors caution that when a programme or school is making a switch from a more formal way of teaching literacy to a more developmentally appropriate, play-based method that is based on the readiness of the children, administrators and teachers be mindful of the time it takes to settle in to the new approach. With consistent professional development and proper support, the switch to a play-based curriculum can have a positive effect on literacy development and future academic achievement. But it does take time. Because the first cohort did not catch up, even by year seven, and the EC2 cohort only matched the control group, further study is needed to see if

better professional development would fill in the gaps, or if the EC cohorts did eventually outpace the control group.

Lewis, Boucher, Lupton, and Watson (2000) found a correlation between play and the development of language skills in young children. They conducted a study to determine the relationship between language development and symbolic and functional play. The participants included 40 children from the ages of 1-6, from suburban England. Researchers used the Test of Pretend Play (ToPP), Preschool Language Scale (PLS), Leiter International Performance Test, and Lowe and Costello Symbolic Play Test to assess the children. The ToPP allows researchers to observe children in a natural or structured play setting and assess object substitution, property attribution, and reference to absent objects. A nonverbal version is used with children under the age of three, and the researcher modelled symbolic play for the child to imitate. The PLS assesses expressive and receptive communication skills. The Lowe and Costello Symbolic Play Test is given to children up to age three and is used to observe children playing with realistic toys in a natural, non-structured setting. The Leiter International Performance Test assesses the non-verbal skills in children between the ages of 2 and 18 and requires children to match various items, copy simple designs, and complete patterns.

## **2.6 Summary of Literature Review**

The literature reviewed in this chapter shows the impact of play on skills development in early childhood education as well as relevance of use of play as a teaching method. Various studies on impact of play on skills development have also been reviewed. However, a study conducted by Kananu (2005) to examine parental demands for ECE in Africa in relation to choice and access to early childhood programme revealed that,

although parents have high demand for ECE they have limited choices and information on the programme operations. Thus the study suggested more research in ECE in order to inform the public on the trend and the basic requirement in the program. In this regard, documented evidence on what exactly influences pre-primary school teachers' use of play as a teaching strategy is inadequate. It is from such a background that the following study sought to find out whether teachers' use of play as a teaching strategy is influenced by the type of school, teachers' motivation, teachers' training level, teachers' experience and availability of play materials. Based on the fact that the ECE program is relatively new in country's education system, there is need to conduct a research to establish the use of child centred teaching strategies.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discussed the methods that were adopted to conduct this study. They include research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedures, validity of research instruments and reliability of instruments, data collection methods and data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) states that research design is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data. This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The research design was chosen because it involves quantitative and qualitative analysis that allows the researcher to gather information through questionnaire and large amount of information from observation (Orodho, 2009). As they are on the ground, the researcher aimed at gathering accurate information that was observable to establish the influence of play on the development of pre-school children's skills development in ECE centres. The rationale for the selection of the descriptive survey design was based on the view that it allows researchers to collect data regarding the opinion of participants on a particular topic, and it is used to investigate the existence of relationships (Freeman, 2007). The researcher chosen the descriptive survey design because the aim of the study was to assess the community participation in improving basic education delivery.

Particularly, the study adopted the quantitative descriptive research design which Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) described as the use of survey for the collection of data. Many researchers conclude that this form of survey research involves a self-report which seeks to answer research questions and test hypotheses (Twumasi, 2001). The researcher gathered data from the views of the participants in relation to the instructional supervisory practices and the teachers' professional development. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further explained that in quantitative descriptive research, the investigator seeks to identify the possible existence of relationships rather than to determine causes of relationships.

### **3.3 Target Population**

Target population is a complete set of individual cases or objects with some common observable characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Population, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), refers to the complete set of individuals (subjects) or objects having common observable characteristics in which the researcher is interested. Orodho (2009) also defines a study population as a group of individuals or people with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested. The population is also the complete set of subjects that can be studied: people, objects, animals, plants, organizations from which a sample may be obtained.

The study included headteachers, teachers and pre-school children from public early childhood centres in Effiduase Circuit in the Sekyere East District. The total population was 720 participants. The teachers were selected because they are directly involved with the learners in and outside the classroom.

### **3.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

A sample is a small group selected from a big population of the study (Nyakwara 2009). It is a representative of the population. From the 22 public Early Childhood Education schools in Effiduase Circuit, 20 of them were randomly sampled. For the purpose of the study and data representativeness, the research used the purposive sampling technique to select the 10 early childhood teachers from each of the schools selected for the study which summed up to 200 respondents. Teachers from nursery to basic three were selected for the study. The rationale behind the use of purposive sampling technique was because it enabled the researcher to select the required category of people for the research (teachers). It also helped the researcher to obtain the needed responses.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

Questionnaires were developed by the researcher under the guidance of the research supervisor. Questionnaire was used because it offered actionable data. Also, it was easy for comparability and generalisation of findings. Besides, anonymity of participants was assured and large scale of participants was covered within a short time. Furthermore, there was less pressure on participants in responding to statements from questionnaires. Again, they were cheap, did not require as much effort from the participants in responding to themes, verbal or telephone surveys. It was also analysed more scientifically and objectively than other forms of instruments. Moreover, results from the questionnaires were usually quick and easily quantified through the use of a software package such as the Statistical Package for Service Solution [SPSS] (version 26). The questionnaire had 23 questions under three sections, section a: types of play and their impact on skills development, section b: availability of play materials, teachers' role during plays and section c: policy on play.

However, in using questionnaires, the following weaknesses were encountered. Very few statements were skipped by the participants. It was hard to convey feelings and emotions of the participants and they may have hidden agenda and dishonest responses. Though, the use of questionnaires had some weaknesses, its advantages outweighed the weaknesses; hence, the questionnaires were used as one of the instruments for data collection for the study.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments**

According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), validity of a test is how well a test measures what it is supposed to measure. It is the degree to which the research instruments measures what it is intended to measure. Mutai (2001) states that validity is the degree to which the results obtained from the analysis of data actually represents the phenomenon. To ensure validity of the instruments, content validity was used where the items in the questionnaire were checked against research objectives. An expert opinion was sought from the supervisor to identify items in the questionnaire that needed to be restated or removed from the study.

The researcher conducted a pilot testing in order to pre-test the instruments just before the actual data collection. The purpose of the pilot test was to detect any ambiguity in the instrument so that they could be addressed before the actual study. Pilot test to determine the suitability of the research instruments was carried out in three schools that were not part of the sample. It would provide a check on the questionnaire by establishing which questions were doubled and which ones were ambiguous. All these were done before the final instruments were rolled out to the respondents.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection as the gathering of information needed to address a research problem (Polit & Beck, 2004). Therefore, data collection entails the use of instruments to collect data so as to provide answers to research questions. Before the fieldwork, the researcher acquired an introduction letter from the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba, to help secure permission from the Heads of Schools and Early Childhood Centres in the Effiduase South Circuit.

The researcher visited the schools and introduced herself to the head, sought permission from them to carry the study in their schools, and had a conference with the teachers and other participants who were selected for the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and how they would be involved in the study. After few questions were asked by the participants which the researcher addressed, the researcher sought the consent of the participants. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the participants, and explained to them how to respond to the items. The researcher was available to clarify concerns raised during the data collection. All the filled questionnaires were collected and sealed in an envelope. The researcher thanked the participants before leaving the schools.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of bringing meaning to the raw data collected (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). After the data has been collected it was cross-examined to confirm their accuracy, and identify those items wrongly responded to, spelling mistakes and blank spaces. Data was queued into the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were analysed using simple



frequencies and percentages which were also used to discuss the findings. Tables were used to present the data.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues considered in this study included:

#### ***3.9.1 Informed and voluntary consent***

The cornerstone of ethical research is ‘informed consent’ (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The term consists of two important elements, with each requiring careful consideration, that is, ‘informed’ and ‘consent’. For this purpose, participants were fully informed of what would be asked of them, how the data would be used and what (if any) consequences there could be.

Participants were also made to understand their rights to access their information and the right to withdraw at any point. The informed consent process can be seen as the contract between researcher and the participants. The aspects of ‘informed’ in this study included clear explanation on: Who the researcher was, what the intent of the research was, what data were to be collected from participants, how the data were collected from participants, what level of commitment was required from participants, how the data were to be used and reported and what were the potential risks of taking part in the research.

#### ***3.9.2 Confidentiality of information shared***

This principle is also concerned with offering respect and protection to research participants through assurance of confidentiality of information shared. Participants were assured that the information shared would be between the researcher and participants only. However, if there would be a third party, it would be the

researcher's supervisor. This would help the supervisor to guide the researcher to write the research report well.

### ***3.9.3 Anonymity of research participants***

Participant anonymity means the participant's identity are unknown to the researcher (for example, when using anonymous surveys, the participant identity is truly unknown to the researchers). Anonymity can be ensured by not revealing the identity of the individuals and institutions involved in a study. Typically, anonymity is provided through the use of pseudonyms. In discussing the themes derived from the data collection, participant's identities were hidden by using pseudo names.

### ***3.9.4 No harm to participants and reciprocity***

The researcher needs to consider the potential of harm to the participants, the researcher, the wider community and the institution. The harm can range from physical, resource loss (including time), emotional and reputational. When considering the potential for harm, the approach should be, in descending order, to eliminate, isolate and minimise the risk, with the participants being fully informed on what the risks are. Also, in ensuring the ethic of reciprocity, the researcher considered actively ways through which participants could be compensated for their time and effort. For this reason, information about risks and benefits were provided to participants while seeking their consent.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a description of analysis of data, presentation, interpretation and discussion. The study was on influence of play on the development of pre-school children's skills development in Effiduase Circuit in the Sekyere East District. The first part presents questionnaire return rate, demographic information teachers. The second part presents information on influence of play on the development of pre-school children's skills development. The presentation is based on the questionnaire administered to teachers and observation checklist to confirm availability of play materials and play activities for children.

#### **4.2 Questionnaire Return Rate**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a response rate of 50% is allowed for analysis, response rate of 60% is good and response rate of 70% and over is very good. All 200 questionnaires were returned to the researcher for analysis.

#### **4.3 Demographic Profile of teachers**

The study sought to establish the demographic characteristics of teachers according to professional experience. The responses are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Teachers by Professional Experience*

<b>Professional experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-5 years	110	55%
6-10 years	64	32%
11-15 years	26	13%
Over 15 years	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 1 shows that majority of teachers 110 (55%) had work experience of between 1-5 years. This implied that the school administration had confidence in their teaching, as this would help raise the performance level of development skills. Teachers with experience of between 6-10 years were 64 (32%) and teachers with work experience of between 11-15 years were 26 (13%). This illustrated that majority of teachers had experience and were qualified to manage preschool better for skills development. The study revealed that there were no teachers with professional experience of over 15 years both Primary and Early Childhood Education Schools and their experience is important in teaching especially in the foundation classes (Ngige 2011). This confirmed that most head teachers were in a position to understand the needs of pre-school children and therefore allocated time and play materials.

#### **4.3.1 Teachers' professional qualification**

The study sought to establish the demographic characteristics of teachers according to professional qualification. The responses are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: Teachers by Professional Qualification*

<b>Professional Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Diploma in Education	98	49%
Diploma (Non Education)	10	5%
Degree in Education	62	31%
Degree (Non Education)	12	6%
WASSCE	18	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 2 shows Early Childhood Education teachers' professional qualifications and out of a total of 100 teachers that were interviewed, 98(49%) had a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and 62(31%) had a degree in Early Childhood. This shows that the teachers handling pre-school children in Effiduase District are highly trained and this could be due to the government policy on Early Childhood Education that requires teachers handling pre-school learners to hold either certificate or diploma so that they are able to, plan and organize ECE activities and programmes in pre-school effectively.

The table further indicates that, 10(5%) of the teachers had a diploma in other areas apart from Education, 12(6%) of the teachers had a degree in other areas apart from education and 18(9%) of the teachers had WASSCE certificate. Teachers without qualifications in education are less than those with qualifications in education.

This shows that most teachers had qualifications to lead schools and understand the importance of play in the development of pre-school children skills development hence provide the necessary and relevant facilities to facilitate play in schools for the development of language skills. According to Ngige (2011), qualifications in teaching are considered important in participation and performance of the teachers.

### 4.3.2 Teachers gender

The study sought to find out the distribution of teachers by gender. The responses are shown on Table 3.

*Table 3: Distribution of Teachers by Gender*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	50	25%
Female	150	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 3 clearly indicates that there is gender imbalance in pre-schools with majority of teachers being female. This confirms that more women than men venture in the teaching of young children considering their patience and nurturing skills as mothers. This also implies that ECE has the foundation of baby care role that the male teacher is unable to perform well hence the female teacher understands the needs of young children. This could also be because women are less interested in higher classes and positions in school (Kere, 2000).

## 4.4 Analysis of Research Questions

### 4.4.1 Research Question One: What play-based activities do teachers use in enhancing skills development among pupils in early childhood education in schools at Effiduase South Circuit in the Sekyere East District?

This research question sought to find the play-based activities teachers use in enhancing skills development in pupils in early childhood centres in Effiduase South circuit in the Sekyere East District.

#### ***4.4.1.1 Types of play and their impact cognitive, motor, social, language and speak development***

Children engagement in various types of play influences their developmental stages positively. Preschools where teachers and the children involved in variety of play activities were recorded as well varied while pre-schools where learners and teachers averagely involved in play activities were recorded as moderately varied while those that learners and teachers did not involve at all in play activities were recorded as not varied. The responses are shown in Table 4.

*Table 4: Types of Play and their Impact Cognitive, Motor, Social, Language and Speak Development*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	58	29%
Agree	128	64%
Disagree	12	6%
Strongly Disagree	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

From the observation list the researcher recorded types of play used during both indoor and outdoor. Table 4 indicates that 128(64%) of pre-school teachers interviewed strongly agreed that there were varied types of play available for the children in their schools while 2(1%) strongly disagreed that there were varied types of play available for the children in their schools. Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkof (2011) suggests that "some play opportunities will develop specific individual areas of development, but many will develop several areas. Learning through play has been seen regularly in practice as the most versatile way a child can learn. In play a child

is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play, it's as though he were a head taller than himself' (Vygotsky 1978).

One respondent commented that through play a child's interest and potentials can be identified at an early stage and any disability can be detected and the right intervention sought and therefore children should be left to play and maximize their potentials. The table from the questionnaires shows that majority agreed that types of play influenced development of language skills of children through object and materials that they manipulate during play activities. Data from the observation list also revealed that learners who were engaged in various play activities and had face-to-face conversation with teachers learnt various vocabularies related to language skills development and motor skills development.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Availability of play materials***

Pre-school learning environments as well as the resources to be used are essential in the development of pre-school children. Children learn best when they are part of a secure and stimulating environment full of play materials for stimulation. It is through this that the study sought to investigate the impact of play materials on the development of pre-school children's skills development. The responses from the teachers are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 reveals that 80(40%) of teachers confirmed that play materials were adequate. From the observation and interview schedules, it was observed that during utilization of play materials, teachers engaged learners in direct instructions and led activities, which enabled them to acquire new language and the skills that accompanied the activities. Through observation and interview schedule, it was evident that learners who interacted with the teachers, peers and utilized play materials were eloquent in



communication and free to respond to questions confidently compared to their counterparts from schools who did not utilize play materials.

*Table 5: Availability of Play Materials*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	30	15%
Agree	80	40%
Disagree	76	38%
Strongly Disagree	14	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Data, 2022

However, 76(38%) of teachers confirms that play materials are not adequate. This further suggests that such schools that did not avail play materials to children were disadvantaging children as far as their skills development is concerned. From the observation made by the researcher, it was evident that those schools with inadequate play materials do not provide maximally for children's play.

This was in line with Ndugu (2013) study on utilization of play materials and equipment which confirmed that finances were a major hindrance to the acquisition of play materials and resources. According to Montessori (1940), children learn and develop best in a prepared environment like safe playground where opportunity to play is provided.

#### ***4.4.1.3 Appropriateness of play materials***

Children are active learners and if they are to develop the skills and competence, they must be able to work and access play materials that are appropriate to their developmental age. The researcher sought to find from teachers the appropriateness of play materials in ECE centres. The results are indicated in Table 6.

*Table 6: Appropriateness of Play Materials*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	48	24%
Agree	90	45%
Disagree	48	24%
Strongly Disagree	14	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 6, indicates that 90 (45%) of ECE teachers confirmed that play materials and activities learners engage in were very appropriate to learners age while 48(24%) of ECE teachers confirmed that play materials and activities learners engage in were not very appropriate to learners age. The data confirms Vygotsky (1978) play creates a broad zone of proximal development, both in cognitive and socio-emotional development. According to Vygotsky, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form. Vygotsky theory is relevant as it emphasizes on self-development of the child through play in a social context. This implies that play occupies a major part of pre-school children lives; therefore, materials that are appropriate to their age makes them acquire vocabularies that are within their level hence any of their curriculum should include play activities for children Frobel (1985). This means teachers were the ones on the ground and were involved in identification and selection of all play equipment and materials.

#### ***4.4.1.4 Utilization of play materials***

Play materials and equipment in pre-school learning environment can create a conducive atmosphere for learning. This is brought about by the way the materials are availed and organized by the teacher for children to use. It is through this that the

researcher sought to examine the play materials used by preschool children from observation checklist as shown in Table 7.

*Table 7: Utilization of Play Materials*

Response	Seesaws		Tyres		Ropes		Balls		Climbers	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Adequately used	5	11.9	42	100	4	9.5	42	100	3	7.14
Not adequately used	37	88.1	0	100	38	90.5	0	100	39	92.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 7 clearly indicates that majority of pre-school 37(88.1%) do not adequately utilize sea saws. This is because the equipment is costly and most preschools cannot afford to have it while only 5(11.9%) are adequately utilized due to parents' cooperation to support the schools. The Table also shows that children are adequately using 42(100%) tyres, as tyres are locally available and easy to get for most schools. Majority of pre-schools 38(90%) do not utilize ropes. However, a study by Mahindu (2011), noted that inadequacy of materials encourages aggressiveness, fighting and scrambling for few that are there hence that was not safe as it exposes them to psychological distress hindering children's skills development.

#### **4.4.2 Research Question Two: What impact does play have on Cognitive and Motor skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit?**

The study findings are discussed systematically in relation to the objectives being; to examine the impact of play activities on cognitive and motor skills development.

##### **4.4.2.1 Manipulative play**

This play involves the use of hands, legs and all body parts. It develops hand-eye coordination in children. The study sought to establish from the teachers how

manipulative influence skills development play. The responses are as shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Manipulative Play and Cognitive and Motor Skills Development*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	102	51%
Agree	92	46%
Disagree	6	3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 8 indicates that majority 102(51%) of the teachers agreed that manipulative play enhances cognitive and motor skills development. This was in line with Piaget (1930), that children of between 1-7 years are in pre-operational stage when they show developmental aspect through play and therefore they need many concrete materials to manipulate. Russ (2014) also said manipulation of play materials enhances the development of gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

As they hold play materials during play, get ready to hold writing tools with a fist or finger grasp and draws with a variety of items like crayons, pens, and pencils, make marks and scribbles. This is developed through their muscles during manipulative play. Work in this area; primarily enhances their fine motor skills and spatial awareness. The items to be manipulated should vary depending on the age, interests and needs of the children in the pre-school centre. It is therefore important to maintain a wide range of play materials (Tassoni & Bath, 2000).

#### 4.4.2.2 Creative play

Many early childhoods learning and childcare programmes take learning through play approach and provide blocks of time for children to choose a number of activities. It is for this reason that this study sought to find out from teachers how creative play influences development of skills of pre-children. The responses are shown in Table 9.

*Table 9: Creative Play and Cognitive and Motor Skills Development*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	102	51%
Agree	96	48%
Disagree	2	1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 9 indicates that 102(51%) of the teachers strongly agreed that creative play influences skills development while 96(48%) of teachers agreed that creative play enhances skills development. This is because creative play involves the use of materials like paint, brushes, paper, water and modelling clay hence children are exposed to various activities that are selected by the teachers. Through these, they are able to express, their thoughts hence develop their vocabulary in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

This confirms Ndugu (2013) study that activities provided should allow children to explore for them and use materials provided. Vygotsky, (1976) creative processes modelled in creative play include divergent thinking, broad associations, cognitive flexibility, problem solving, imagination, improvisation, pleasure and absorption. Many early learning and childcare programmes take learning through play approach

and ensure that there are large blocks of time each day when children choose an activity from a number of activities selected by the educator (Russ, 2014).

#### 4.4.2.3 Physical play

Many early childhoods learning and childcare programmes take learning through play approach and provide blocks of time for children to choose a number of activities. It is for this reason that this study sought to find out from teachers how creative play influences development of skills of pre-children. The responses are shown in Table 10.

*Table 10: Physical Play and Cognitive and Motor Skills Development*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	90	45%
Agree	108	54%
Disagree	2	1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

Table 10 indicates that 90(45%) of the teachers strongly agreed that physical play influences skills development while 108(54%) of teachers agreed that creative play enhances skills development in children. Hofferth and Sandberg (2000) despite the known benefits of play, there is evidence to suggest less of children's time is being devoted to play in favours of structured education activities. Appropriate toys and materials encourage children to build muscle and strength. Children gain practice and gain confidence as they manipulate play materials. Toys, swings, balls and ladders for climbing help children to explore in many different ways, build eye-hand coordination and encourage children to think about how things work. Some of these items like

ladders swings and balls promote balance and body awareness (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000). Hobart and Frankel (2009) confirm that play is a way through which children expend on excess energy and maintains physical fitness.

#### **4.4.3 Research Question Three: What impact does play have on social and emotional, speech and language skills development at early childhood centres in Effiduase South Circuit?**

This research question sought to examine the impact of play activities on social and emotional skills development and speech and language skills development of pupils in early childhood centres in the Effiduase South Circuit.

##### ***4.4.3.1 Dramatic play***

This play involves acting roles and situations. The respondents are asked to rate the level in which dramatic play influences skills development. The responses are indicated in Table 11.

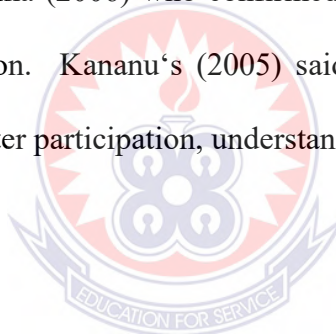
*Table 11: Dramatic play and Social and Emotional Skills Development and Speech and Language Skills Development*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	84	42%
Agree	112	56%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fiend Data, 2022

In Table 11, 84(42%) of ECE teachers strongly agree while 112(56%) agree that dramatic play promotes the skills development of pre-school children. This is

because the learners are able to listen to instructions, perform the roles as they speak, read the scripts and write essays related to the roles they perform. Whitebread (2017) dramatic play promotes the use of speaking and listening skills. When children take part in the play, they practice words they have heard others say and realise that they must listen to what other players say in order to respond in an appropriate manner. It teaches children to choose their words wisely, so that others will understand exactly what it is they are trying to communicate (Whitebread, 2017). According to Wood and Artfield (2005) not only do children derive satisfaction through make believe play but also from the ability to imitate. They practice words they have heard from others and realize that they must listen and organize meaningful scripts through writing. This is in line with Khoima (2006) who confirmed that learning by doing raises the learner's level of retention. Kananu's (2005) said that learning and teaching aids increases chances of greater participation, understanding and retention rate.





## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

#### **5.2 Summary**

The purpose of this study was to establish influence of play on the skills development among pre-school children in Effiduase Circuit in the Sekyere East District. The study was based on three objectives: To examine the impact of games and play activities on Cognitive and Motor skills development, to examine the impact of games and play activities on Social and emotional skills development and Speech and language skills development, to find out teachers' usage of games and play-based activities in enhancing skills development.

The study used descriptive survey design where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation checklist were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics was used to determine frequencies, Percentages and means.

#### **5.3 Summary of the Findings**

The first objective of the study was to find out teachers' usage of games and play-based activities in enhancing skills development. The study established that children in schools that posted better mean scores in language skills were where teachers

provided simulative play environment by availing play materials, directing them on how to utilize play materials and instructing children on activities to involve in accordingly.

In reference to the second objective, the study examined the impact of games and play activities on Cognitive and Motor skills development. These included activities that prepare the children to be functional members of society and therefore the school environment in which the child operates must be that which will promote the development of requisite skills. The various types of play like manipulative, creative, dramatic and physical play were essential components of skills development since they clearly indicated the children's blending both play and activities involving movement in school environment.

However, the study established that those schools that did not expose learners to various forms of play did not perform well in cognitive and motor skills tests because of inaccessibility to materials that limited their interaction in play. It therefore means that use of resources in the teaching and learning of children enhances better retention in children. Play is an important component in teaching and learning in pre-schools. The study established that availability of play materials and their utilization was an important component in the teaching and learning of young children.

The third objective of the study was on the impact of games and play activities on Social and emotional skills development and Speech and language skills development. It was observed that the materials that the children were exposed to contributed immensely to performance in skills development as indicated in their frequencies. This was because they were able to acquire new skills as they use the materials.

The study found out that children in schools that utilized play materials effectively posted high mean scores in all the development skill acquisition because children had face-to face interaction with teachers, and their peers, listened to instruction given by teachers. The use of these play materials improved their gross motor skill, improved their eye-hand coordination which prepared them for reading and writing. The study established that school that posted lower mean scores had minimal interaction with teachers and peers during play and these hampered their skills development. It was observed that some play materials like balls, bean bags, ropes were easy to acquire and assemble for children to access during play. However, some fixed equipment like sea-saws, swings and balancing were not accessible to the school and children due to cost hence limited in use in pre-schools and this hampered their skills development as it gave learners little opportunity to interact.

#### **5.4 Conclusions**

Based on the findings it was concluded that provision of different types of play and play materials gave the children opportunity to learn through manipulating and experimenting for themselves. Through these, they are able to acquire all the developmental skills that is cognitive, language, motor, social and emotional skills. The study revealed that pre-school children who engaged in play activities were confident and eloquent in their speech and positively and freely interacted with everybody around them. That most preschools did not have equipment like sandpit, sea saws, balancing, swings and ladders due to cost implication hence most head teachers did not consider this play materials and equipment as priority to preschools.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Teachers should be encouraged to take a major role in planning and organizing play activities. This will ensure that various play materials are provided to children according to appropriate age and interest play in preschools

The supervision of ECE centres' need to be enhanced to ensure teachers allocate adequate time and play materials to enable children develop skills for holistic development of children.

The government through the Ministry of Education should provide adequate playing materials for pre-school centres and clearly define the play activities according to the developmental stages of children. The government should enhance provision of early childhood play materials to enable preschool children develop holistically.

## **5.6 Suggestion for Further Research**

Despite the findings of the study, there are areas that still need further research. A study should be carried out on the government policy on play and academic achievement. A similar study need to be carried out on the influence of physical education and academic performance in primary school. Further study to be done on parents' perception on play in pre-schools.

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## APPENDICES

### A

#### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRE-SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS

##### THE IMPACT OF PLAY ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

My name is Esther Serwaa and I am a student of the University of Education Winneba, pursuing a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education. This is a questionnaire that has been designed to elicit responses from Early Childhood Teachers in Some Selected Schools to find the impact of games and play on skills development in Early Childhood. I would be grateful if you could take some time to answer these questions for me. All responses given in this questionnaire will be treated as highly confidential and will be used strictly for research purposes only. Your full name will not be required but your initials will be required to authenticate the responses.

Please contact Esther Serwaa on **0541671755** for Any Queries and Clarification.

**Initials.....Sign.....Date.....**

#### Demographic Information

Name of School .....

Class .....

Years of Experience.....

Highest Education Level.....

Qualification.....

Sex.....

#### Types of Play and Their Impact on Skills Development

1. This school offers different types of play to children.
  - i. Strongly agree
  - ii. Agree
  - iii. Disagree
  - iv. Strongly Disagree

2. What are some of the games and plays organised by teachers in this school?

.....  
.....

**Availability of Play Materials**

3. There are enough play materials for children in this school (Early Childhood Centre).

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- i. Disagree
- iii. Strongly disagree

4. What type of play materials do learners usually use during play time?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. What play materials are NOT available in this schools?

.....  
.....  
.....

6. Available play materials are appropriate for learners' age.

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree

7. School administration support play by providing adequate play materials.

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree

### Teachers' Role During Play

8. Teachers have adequate knowledge in planning and organizing play based activities for learners.
- i. Strongly agree
  - ii. Agree
  - iii. Disagree
  - iv. Strongly disagree
9. What do teachers do to ensure children's safety during play?

.....

.....

.....

### Policy on Play

10. Learners are given adequate time to play.
- i. Strongly agree
  - ii. Agree
  - iii. Disagree
  - iv. Strongly disagree
11. The children have enough space to play.
- i. Strongly agree
  - ii. Agree
  - iii. Disagree
  - iv. Strongly disagree
12. Children's safety is ensured during play.
- i. Strongly agree
  - ii. Agree
  - iii. Disagree
  - iv. Strongly disagree



**B**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS  
THE IMPACT OF PLAY ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

My name is Esther Serwaa and I am a student of the University of Education Winneba, pursuing a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education. This is a questionnaire that has been designed to elicit responses from Early Childhood Teachers in Some Selected Schools to find the impact of games and play on skills development in Early Childhood. I would be grateful if you could take some time to answer these questions for me. All responses given in this questionnaire will be treated as highly confidential and will be used strictly for research purposes only. Your full name will not be required but your initials will be required to authenticate the responses.

Please contact Esther Serwaa on **0541671755** for Any Queries and Clarification.

**Initials.....Sign.....Date.....**

**Demographic Information**

Name of School .....

Class .....

Years of Experience.....

Highest Education Level.....

Qualification.....

Sex.....

**Types of Play and Their Impact on Skills Development**

1. This school offers different types of play to children.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly Disagree

2. What are some of the games and plays organised by teachers in this school?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. Manipulative play enhances skills development.

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly Disagree

4. Which skills are enhanced by manipulative play?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. Creative play enhances skills development.

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree

6. Which skills are enhanced by creative play?

.....  
.....  
.....

7. Physical play enhances skills development.

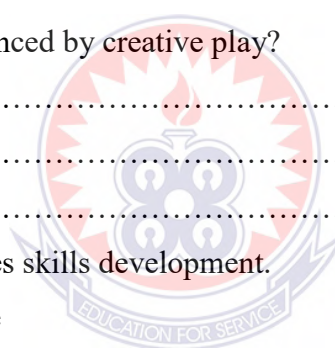
- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree

8. Which skills are enhanced by physical play?

.....  
.....  
.....

9. Dramatic play enhances skills development.

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree





10. Which skills are enhanced by dramatic play?

.....  
.....

**Availability of Play Materials**

11. There are enough play materials for children in this school (Early Childhood Centre).

- iv. Strongly agree
- v. Agree
- ii. Disagree
- vi. Strongly disagree

12. What type of play materials do learners usually use during play time?

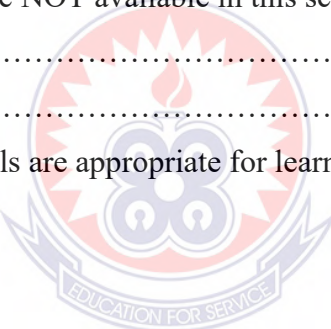
.....  
.....

13. What play materials are NOT available in this schools?

.....  
.....

14. Available play materials are appropriate for learners' age.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree



15. School administration support play by providing adequate play materials.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree

**Teachers' Role During Play**

16. Teachers have adequate knowledge in planning and organizing play based activities for learners.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree

17. What role do teachers play during play time?

.....  
.....

18. What do teachers do to ensure children's safety during play?

.....  
.....

19. The playground is safe for children to play.

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Disagree
- iv. Strongly disagree

20. Which outdoor games are organised for the children?

.....  
.....

**Policy on Play**

21. Learners are given adequate time to play.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree



22. The children have enough space to play.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree

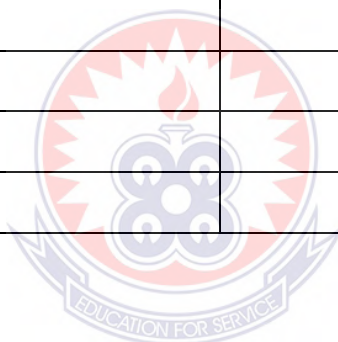
23. Children's safety is ensured during play.

- v. Strongly agree
- vi. Agree
- vii. Disagree
- viii. Strongly disagree

**C**

**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

<b>FACILITIES</b>	<b>AVAILABLE IN USE</b>	<b>AVAILABLE NOT IN USE</b>	<b>NOT AVAILA</b>
Tyres			
Sand pits			
Swings			
Balls			
Climbers			
Ropes			
Skipping Ropes			
Riding tyres			
Jumping			
Ropes Pulling			
Ball Playing			



**D**

**SAMPLE TEST FOR PRE SCHOOL CHILDREN**

**DICTATION**

- i. Bag
- ii. Ant
- iii. Dog
- iv. Cat
- v. Fox

**READING**

- i. Pencil
- ii. School
- iii. Teacher
- iv. Home
- v. Table

**MEMORY TEST**

Listen and Repeat all number

- i. 20145
- ii. 49201
- iii. 96702
- iv. 435691
- v. 873589

**DRAWING**

- i. A tree



- ii. The sun



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FES/DECE/S.6

19<sup>th</sup> November, 2021

The Director  
Ghana Education Service  
Box 2  
Sekyere East  
Affiduase Ashanti

Dear Sir/Madam

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER

We write to introduce to you **Ms. Esther Serwaa** with index number 200049543 who is an M. Ed student in the above department. She was admitted in 2019/2020 academic year and has successfully completed her course work and is to embark on her thesis on the topic: **“The impact of play on skills development in early childhood education in Sekyere East District”**.

**Ms. Serwaa** 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 'Samuel Oppong Frimpong'.

**Samuel Oppong Frimpong, Ph. D**  
Ag. Head of Department



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