UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

PLAY ACTIVITIES AMONG PRESCHOOLERS AT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN THE SANGNARIGU MUNICIPALITY

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MARCH, 2024

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

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

Signature: …….

Date: …….

Supervisor's Declaration

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

Supervisor**: Michael Subbey (PhD.)**

Signature……

Date…….

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My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Michael Subbey for his dedication and timeless guidance throughout this research. I also express my appreciation to all the lecturers especially late Dr. Nutifafa K. Banini for their support. Special thanks to my family for their moral support and encouragement.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project work to my family.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate play activities among pre-schoolers at early childhood centres in the Sangnarigu Municipality. This research employed the concurrent nested mixed method design where the quantitative method is dominant to the qualitative method. The accessible population of the study was all kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality. There were one hundred and forty (140) kindergarten teachers in the ten circuits within the Sangnarigu Municipality. This comprised fifteen (15) males and one hundred and twenty-five (125) female teachers. The sample size for the study was one hundred and forty (140) participants. Participants were sampled through census and purposive sampling techniques questionnaire and interview guide was used to collect data for the study. The findings indicate that some teachers viewed play and learning as two separate or dichotomous activities, but others believed children learn through play. The findings of the study revealed that play features on the school timetable of public kindergartens in the district. The findings also revealed that teachers played several roles when using play-based teaching as an instructional technique and activity The findings of this study identified lack and inadequacy of play equipment and materials, not having enough indoor space, not enough time on the schedule, and having too many pupils to teach. Based on the first research question, the study recommends that the Sangnarigu Municipality Directorate of Education should organise periodic workshops for kindergarten teachers on the importance of play. Finally, with respect to fourth research question, the study recommends that the Sangnarigu Municipal Directorate of Education in liaison with the Sangnarigu Municipal Assembly and Non-Governmental Organisations in the district should provide adequate play materials and equipment to all public kindergartens in the distric

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Background to the study

Children in their formative years (0-8) are biologically programmed to be active. Play forms part of childhood activities, and so child development and growth is dependent on it. Children of all ages love to play, and it gives them opportunities to explore the world, interact with others, express and control emotions, develop their symbolic and problem-solving abilities, be self-regulated and practise emerging skills. In play, children learn to navigate their physical and social environment, while also imagining and constructing new realities (Otami, 2018). Play has been stated as a fundamental right of the child in Article 31 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989). Play is core to all aspects of the child's development in kindergartens worldwide. It is a lifetime learning experience. So, it is a necessity and an integral part of the early childhood education curriculum in Ghana. This is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states, "Children have the right to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic, and other recreational activities" (UNICEF, 2013, p.3).

Play is "a behaviour that is self-motivated, freely chosen process oriented and enjoyable" (Awopegpa, Odulowu & Nsamenang, 2013, p. 99). Play by children is a self-driven social endeavour meant to wake the body up and occupy free time (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009). Although this definition may seem generic, and not specific to the particular indigenous context, early childhood educators must create a play environment that reflects attitudes and values of the surrounding culture (Awopegpa et al., 2013, p. 100). In the context of this study, play is operationalized as a way of life for children to make sense of the world. Put another way, play is the mechanism by which children interpret, make sense, and complete their world.

Play is an activity and a process. As a process and disposition, play cannot be defined by its subject matter: "play is a particular attitude or approach to materials, behaviours, and ideas and not the materials or activities or ideas themselves; play is a special mode of thinking and doing" (McLane, 2003, p. 11). The process of play is characterised by a non-literal 'what if' approach to thinking, where multiple ends or outcomes are possible. In other words, play generates situations where there is no one 'right' answer. McLane (2003, p. 11) described this as conferring "a sense of possibility, as well as ownership, control and competence on the player."

Play is a dynamic ever-changing process that is multisensory, interactive, creative, and imaginative (Armstrong, 2006). Play is a spontaneous active process in which thinking, feeling, and doing can flourish. A child's play may be boisterous and energetic, or quiet and contemplative, light hearted or very serious. Through play, children begin to understand their world. Play is satisfying in its own right. The essential characteristics of play include the exercise of choice, non-literal approaches, multiple possible outcomes, and acknowledgement of the competence of players. These characteristics apply to the processes of play, regardless of the content. In addition, thinking of play as a disposition, or habit of mind (Carr, 2014), helps to link it with other dispositions that are valued in education (Ginsburg, 2006).

Play is often an inherently social activity. It is any activity that an individual engages himself/herself in for pleasure, recreation, rather than a serious or practical purpose. Children's play is a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child, and freely chosen by the child. It is an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than for serious or practical purpose and game is competitive or a sport that is played as per rules. It provides children with opportunities to be creative and build-up abstract thinking in them. In the opinion of Wu (2014), play

provides children with experiences that support social, cognitive, and language development and creativity. Through play, children have opportunities to interact with peers. Such casual interactions may promote social competence behaviour, which are necessary for later learning. Play also allows children to apply and use the skills and knowledge they have already acquired. Practicing skills such as self-help skills allows children to master these skills and feel competent (Klein, 2013). For example, a child who may not be able to pour milk into a cup can practice using a toy cup and jug. According to Klein (2013), the feeling of competence promotes a child's self-efficacy. An environment which is playful and stimulating can facilitate children's higher level thinking (Klein, 2013). However, this is not the scenario in many public kindergarten settings in the Sangnarigu Municipality. This situation if not addressed might hinder the holistic development of kindergarten pupils in the study setting.

Play in children is a powerful tool and is a predictor of optimal early learning and future success in life (Grand Fun Alley Learning Centre, 2014). It is generally accepted that playing stimulates the development of social interaction, logical and strategic thinking, sometimes competitiveness, or at other times teamwork and togetherness. In the views of Kirriemuir and McFarlane (2004), play supports learning of competencies, collaboration, and participation. It enables children to explore the customs and roles of their direct community, to reflect upon their inner selves and their emotions, to encounter abstract thinking and to develop communication skills.

The idea of learning through play is highly valued and has received a lot of attention in early childhood education by scholars and educators such as Vygotsky (1976), Bruner (1976), Fröbel and others (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). To Vygotsky (1976), children's play can support the highest level of development. He argued that even solitary play replicates social and cultural contexts, particularly in the rules and roles

adopted by players. When play involves others – be they adults or children – opportunities for scaffolding (Bruner, 1976) occur as children interact with more knowledgeable and experienced others. The social interactions within play facilitate joint meaning making, as children test out, explain, and enact their perspectives and understandings, at the same time as they encounter those of others. Social interaction in play provides support for the challenges children often construct in play, creating opportunities for innovation, risk taking, and problem solving. Such interactions also underpin mathematical thinking. It seemed that play provides equal avenues for children to engage in social interaction in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

In play, children communicate and interpret continuously in the negotiation with peers and role play. At the same time as they act the play, they produce the content of it by talking about what to do and in what way it should be done, that is, the meta-communicative approach children take in their play. Through play, children can make choices, and enhance their social skills, and so on. Play, together with friends, allows children to exercise self-control and develop what they already know, take turns, cooperate, and socialise with others. Children learn so much from play; it teaches them social skills such as sharing, taking turns, self-discipline and tolerance of others (Wood & Attfield, 2005).

According to Almon (2003), children who involve themselves in child-initiated play may have longer concentration spans in learning. Play gives children opportunities to be in control of what is happening and what they know. In children's play, there are unsuspected opportunities to symbolize and use objects in a way that is meaningful and thrilling to them. Children's lives are enhanced by playing creatively, by playing children learn, and develop as individuals; it assists in their emotional and intellectual

development and mental health resilience which are core building blocks for their transition years.

The notion which is widely held globally is that, children can learn through play originated from Froebel. He believed that play is the heart of children's development. He believes that the natural unfolding (development) of children occur through play. Play is a necessity which cannot be separated from learning and work. Therefore, it must be integrated into learning or be used as a dimension of learning in early childhood education. For this reason, play has long been regarded as a critical element of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. It is against this backdrop that Froebel introduced play as an important activity in kindergarten education (Lindqvist, 2001), even though Montessori distanced play from work in kindergarten in principle. In this study, however, play and learning (work) are inseparable in the context of quality kindergarten education. Hence, learning cannot be distanced from play in kindergarten settings in the study area.

Children engage in a variety of play activities in order to meet their developmental needs. Play is seen as a vehicle for learning (Rogers, 2013), to create meaning from their experiences. In addition to being recognised as a vehicle for learning, play is described as a context in which children can demonstrate their own learning and help scaffold the learning of others (Wood, 2014). It provides an opportunity for children to learn in their cultural environment. Therefore, early childhood educators must design a play environment that "reflects attitudes and values of the surrounding culture" as noted by Awopegpa et al. (2013, p. 100).

The meaning a teacher attaches to play guides the way he/she designs classroom activities, which consequently impact children's learning. To understand the meaning

teachers attach to play, its role in classroom settings and to children's development, it is necessary to explore the perceptions and instructional practices of teachers. Classroom environments therefore are expected to be designed by the teachers based on their perspectives on play and learning. Teachers' practices may also be influenced by professional training as well as the guiding policy of education, and both training and policy may give precedence to values imported from outside the local or national culture (Moyes, 2010).

Child education starts from the kindergarten. Early childhood education is the foundation level at which children are prepared for formal school life. This level of education prepares the base and lays strong and solid foundation which helps children throughout their school life. It is perceived that children are not machines. You cannot simply add more fuel and speed them up. They are governed by internal processes that are sometimes called the laws of child development. Therefore, play must form an integral part of teaching and learning in a kindergarten environment. Again, play is part and parcel of children's natural behavior embedded in their day-to-day spontaneous living. It forms an important part of pre-school and out-of-school early learning. It is believed that play is the most appropriate method of teaching children in their early years (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2012).

Therefore, the school has to acknowledge it and build on it. Notwithstanding, there are debates around play and learning. The debate evokes questions such as, 'Does all play offer learning experiences to children?' (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011) and 'Does learning through play help to meet the essential content of the curriculum?' (Colliver, 2012). What is the role of play in formal education, and what are teachers' roles when play is used? These questions raise the debate on whether play is an important component of kindergarten education in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

In the hurry up, fast paced, tightly scheduled, high pressured and achievement-based world of many children today, early childhood educators, caregivers and adults place less emphasis on the use of play in early childhood education and development centres. Accordingly, children's lives are more and more contained and controlled by small apartments, television, computer games, intense academic instruction, as well as tense, tired, and overworked parents which translate to fewer opportunities for children to play. Because of these, there is concern about the negative social, cognitive, and emotional impact of spending less time interacting with others through play in the natural environment.

In fact, many early childhood educators often view play as counter-productive for children's learning, and in most kindergartens, children have no particular time assigned to free-play (Wu, 2014). This phenomenon is not different from the scenario in many kindergartens in the Sangnarigu Municipality. In the context of early childhood education in the district, play and learning are often separated in time as well as in space. Play is often put aside by teachers until leisure time or outdoor hours and is part of children's own resort. This raises the question of whether is play still as important as often claimed in early childhood education in Ghana, particularly in public basic schools within the Sangnarigu Municipality.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality seemed to give little attention to children's learning through play even though the curricula of early childhood education in Ghana place much emphasis on play to be of the utmost importance in teaching and learning. From the researcher teaching experience, the researcher observed that many public kindergarten school teachers in the district have reduced or eliminated play from their schedules and instructional practices although

play has been advocated as a key strategy in children's development. This could be that most of these teachers give little time to play, as their focus is on non-stop academic instruction, children's memorization of facts, and standardized tests in the Sangnarigu Municipality. Most of teachers also stay in the classroom during outdoor activities doing other things instead of observing children at play and identifying their skills of socialization and physical development. If this problem is not addressed, kindergarten children in the municipality will enter primary schools less able to play and learn cooperatively and self-regulate. This might also curtail the freedom of kindergarten children to play in schools.

A number of researchers (Carlson, 2011a; Elkind, 2007; Falk, 2012; Freeman & Brown, 2004; Frost & Woods, 2015; Levin, 2013; Pelligrini & Holmes, 2006; Rivkin, 2014; Rivkin, 2015) have also observed that free play and guided play are disappearing in many public schools recess time is also being reduced or cancelled in many schools, replaced by more cognitive-based academic pursuits. They further explained that the removal of physical play in schools, coupled with a reduction in outdoor play at home is leading children towards a more sedentary lifestyle, and negatively impacting children's development. In their view, children's lives are being scheduled with structured activities and team sports, and then bombarded with mobile devices, television, video games, and computers which, while they do provide new opportunities for learning, occur in an overwhelmingly sedentary state (Falk, 2012; Frost & Woods, 2015; Rivkin, 2015).

Moreover, the 2019 quarterly documentary reports by the early childhood coordinator, private school coordinator and circuit supervisors in the Sangnarigu Municipal Directorate of Education give credence to the issue that play is rarely used by most public kindergarten teachers during indoor (classroom) and outdoor teaching and

learning activities. In February 2019, the Sangnarigu Municipal Directorate of Education organised a workshop on play-based teaching and learning to both public and private kindergarten teachers. At the workshop in course of deliberations, it was observed that, majority of the kindergarten teachers rarely used play as a pedagogy during instruction because of perceived challenges in its implementation. This was evident in the contributions the teachers and other participants made during open forum. All these observations suggest that kindergarten children in the district are not given many opportunities to play and explore the world around them. This suggests that less time is devoted to children's play in kindergartens in the district.

Several researchers (Bodrova & Leong, 2010; Brandon, 2002; Murline, 2000; Sisson, 2011; Vail, 2003) have also cited a reduction and/or elimination of play from kindergarten classrooms. They averred that play has gradually been replaced with academic readiness practice, particularly in literacy and reading to match the content of standardized testing. Research also shows that in addition to play disappearing in classrooms, children are playing together less outside the classroom, and there is a decrease in play with their parents as well (Elkind, 2007; Singer, Golinkogg, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). A possible factor contributing to teachers' limited use of play for teaching could be insufficient training on the integration of play into instructional practices.

A few studies from South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya depict perceptions on the meaning and benefits of play (Adjei, 2012; Andiema, Kemboi & M'mbone, 2013; Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Bernstein & Magalhaes, 2009; Finnegan, 2014; Kalinde & Vermeulen, 2016; Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010; Shavega, Brugman & Van Tuijl, 2014). A study in Ghana and Tanzania found that parents were not in agreement with the integration of play into school (academic) work as academic work was regarded of more significance (Adjei, 2012; Hännikäinen, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Mtahabwa & Rao,

2010). The source of confusion and possible aversion to play as a learning method is that play is regarded by some as synonymous with activities that exist purely for purposeless enjoyment. Parents and teachers alike sometimes fail to realize that play engages young children more than anything else does in the classroom or even in their daily lives (Clayton, 2007). The contribution of the studies above in addressing play and its role in education is acknowledged. Paradoxically, although there have been many studies of children's play, few have specifically focused on play in education. However, an in-depth examination of play in the teaching and learning context remains necessary.

Although previous studies (Amlor, 2016; Nabie, 2012; Otami, 2018) investigated the phenomenon, that is use of play for child development in kindergartens in Ghana, they are scanty. More so, these studies were not conducted in the present study setting, and the study did not also focus on play activities among pre-schoolers at the early childhood centres in the Sangnarigu Municipality. This creates cultural and contextual gaps that need to be filled by this study. The researcher envisages that this study would yield valid results and recommendations to inform stakeholders of Early Childhood Education on the role of play in child development.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate play activities among pre-schoolers at early childhood centres in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

1.3. Objectives of the study

In line with the purpose of the research, this study specifically sought to:

1. To solicit the perceptions of kindergarten teachers on play activities at public kindergartens in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

2. Examine instructional practices of kindergarten teachers in play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality.
3. Identify the challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

1.4. Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers on play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality?
2. What are the instructional practices of kindergarten teachers in play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality?
3. What challenges do public kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality?

1.5. Significance of the study

This research is justified because it would provide empirical evidence to guide theory, policy, and practice as regards the scientific debate on the use of play as a pedagogy for teaching and learning in early childhood education. Theoretically, the findings of the study would fill the knowledge gap on the topic under investigation. Therefore, the findings of this study would add up to existing literature for any researcher interested in this area of study.

To practitioners, the outcome of the study would inform teachers to adopt play in his or her lesson to facilitate better understanding of learners. To School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations, the outcome of this study would inform and motivate them to support kindergartens with basic play materials to promote teaching and learning in kindergartens in the district. Policy wise, the findings of this

research would inform the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service, Colleges of Education and Universities that train early childhood educators to include play activities in the early childhood curriculum.

1.6. Delimitations of the study

The study was restricted to twenty (20) selected public basic schools in Sangnarigu Municipality. The study focused on public basic schools due to accessibility and convenience of participants. Again, play is a very broad area of research that has been widely studied. The focus of study was on play activities among pre-schoolers at the early childhood centres in the study setting. Also, the study focused on public kindergarten teachers at the early childhood centres only. Thus, the study is limited because the sample consisted only of public kindergarten teachers who participated in it; its. findings regarding play activities cannot be generalized to the whole population of kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality.

1.7. Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study was the inability of the researcher to obtain observation data on the availability of play materials and equipment in the schools because of the closure of all schools. Another limitation of this study was the challenge of unwillingness on the part of some of the respondents to provide the information for fear of the outcome of the research. However, the respondents were assured of their confidentiality. They were also briefed on the purpose of the research and that the results were to be used for research only. In this regard, they willingly provided the information.

1.8. Definition of Terms

Play: is a range of intrinsically motivated activities done for recreational pleasure and enjoyment. Play is commonly associated with children and juvenile-level activities, but

may be engaged in at any life stage, and among other higher-functioning animals as well, most notably mammals and birds.

Pre-schooler: A child who is under 5 years old and has not entered kindergarten. Pre-schoolers are different from toddlers in that they are developing the basic life skills, independence, and knowledge that they will need as they enter their school years.

Instructional practice: refers to how information is delivered, received, and experienced by students. The multitude of instructional practices typically fall under major categories such as teacher directed and student centred.

Instructional scaffolding: is a process through which a teacher adds supports for students in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of tasks. The teacher does this by systematically building on students' experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills.

Early Childhood: The period from birth to age 8.

1.9. Organisation of the study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study and organisation of the study. Chapter two reviews related literature. Chapter three, the methodology, contains the research philosophy, research design, population, sample size and sampling techniques, instrumentation, validity and reliability of the instruments**,** data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter four is results/findings and discussions. Chapter five gives the summary, conclusion, and recommendations based on the results of the study. This chapter also makes suggestions on relevant areas for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Overview

This chapter presents the literary empirical evidence supporting this work. Multiple theories of play abound, but there are different perspectives of play depending on the lens through which it is viewed. These lenses facilitate different approaches to play in early childhood settings. The groundwork for this research was developed from the theoretical constructs of Piaget's (1948, 1962) cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory. The empirical evidence of this work was built on the research questions for the study. This section teases out, among others, teachers' understanding, and perception of play, and their instructional roles in children's play. This chapter, therefore, reviews literature under the following areas:

- Theoretical framework.
- Understanding of play activities
- Teachers' perceptions of play activities.

- Instructional practices of teachers in play activities.
- The roles or benefits of play activities in the development of pupils.
- Challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities.

2.1. Theoretical framework

There are theories that have been propounded on children's development. This study adopted Piaget's (1948, 1962) cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory.

2.1.1. Piaget's (1948, 1962) Cognitive Constructivism

Piaget theorized that cognitive development begins at birth. He taught that children learn about their surroundings through active engagement using their senses, and that it is through this active engagement that children construct knowledge (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Central to Piaget's theory is the idea that knowledge is acquired through a constructive process of the learner and that through meaningful activities, children not only practice and improve their social skills but also engage in cognitive acts that expand their repertories of learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Piaget (1948, 1962) believed that children can construct knowledge about the real world through play. This view suggests that children integrate both cognitive and emotional information in meaningful ways with the help of a rich environment and supportive adult (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Through this lens, the child is seen as a knowledge constructor who uses the environment to learn. Children continue adjusting their understanding of the environment and their experiences through the process of assimilation and accommodation. During assimilation, the child takes in new information and fits it into what he/she already know about the world, his/her schema.

Accommodation occurs when the child needs to adjust his previous understanding or schema to fit this new information (Piaget, 1948).

Piaget (1948, 1962) emphasises the importance of young children constructing knowledge and understanding concepts through their own activities as opposed to being told correct answers by other (Berk, 2006; Crain, 2000; Essa, 2007; Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). Piaget sees the child as the source of action, actively constructing knowledge through a process of meaning-making through connection with prior knowledge and the real world (Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). When mismatch occurs, the child experiences disequilibrium, thereby activating his/her mental processes to resolve such disequilibrium, and in doing so, creates a new scheme (Essa, 2007).

Piaget views cognitive development as a process in stages (Essa, 2007). A child develops from the sensorimotor stage, pre-operational stage to concrete operational and finally formal operational stage (Essa, 2007). Each of these stages is characterised by qualitative changes in a child's thinking (Piaget, 1962). In the sensorimotor stage (from birth to two years), the infant knows about the world through their actions and perceptions. In the preoperational stage (from two to six years), children begin to use symbols, images, words or actions to represent their thoughts. Their thinking is characterised by egocentrism, irreversibility and centration (Berk, 2006). In the concrete operational stage (from six to twelve years), children understand concepts of conservation and continue to expand their thinking and can perform logical mental operations, such as addition and subtraction. In the formal operational stage (twelve years onwards), children are able to reason deductively, to formulate and test hypotheses (Essa, 2007).

Piaget (1962) asserted that children acquire physical, logic-mathematical, and social knowledge when they explore their environment. Physical knowledge is acquired from activities that allow children to observe and draw conclusions about the physical properties of the objects. In the logic-mathematical realm, children's thoughts become more differentiated and are able to act on the objects and create abstract reasoning and relationships, for example, a child playing with blocks will soon discover that the longer piece can serve as a sturdier base than the shorter. Social knowledge is assimilated through social conventions that have been taught by third parties through imparting cultural norms and societal customs and acceptable behaviours. Through social interchanges, children begin to be more aware of the ideas and opinions of peers and they learn that others can have views different from their own.

Piaget's conceptualization of how play influences the stages of cognitive development in children has had a substantial impact on early childhood education. From a practical viewpoint, teachers who believe in the constructivist cognitive approach will provide a classroom environment that allows for exploration and experimentation, and is seen as "operating with" a child where the teacher follows a "wait-challenge-wait" procedure and ensuring that the child has ample opportunity to assimilate and accommodate through the provision of novelty in the environment (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Piaget emphasised that play is not the same as learning but provides a relaxed atmosphere in which learning can easily occur through assimilation and children can construct knowledge by taking something and making it fit to what they already know. He saw the importance of symbolic play in the formation of children's mental representation and abstract thinking and talked about sensorimotor or physical play where children repeat a physical activity, such as swinging their feet or throwing their head back, for the sheer enjoyment of doing it (Essa, 2011). In all, it could be inferred

from Piaget's theory that play is a means to end and not an end in itself. In other words, it is a means by which children construct knowledge and learn. In this regard, play and learning are separable. Although Piaget depicts a dichotomous view on play and learning, his theory is relevant to this study because through play children explore, discover, and construct knowledge of the world around them. It is worth noting that Piaget's theory focusses more on exploring the physical environment and constructing knowledge from it.

2.1.2. Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-Cultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. Vygotsky believed that social interactions are crucial to learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Social interaction is where a child works with another child or adult. According to Vygotsky, children in their right setting with the right set of directions can experience success through play (Bartlett, 2011). Play, as a social activity is relevant to children's lives because it engages their natural curiosity and serves as a means that helps children reaches their possible level (Xu, 2010). Vygotsky theory stresses that play serves as a natural context that helps strengthen cognitive development. Since play can be a collaborative activity in which social interaction takes place, ideas will be shared and thinking will develop (Powell & Kalina, 2009). During play activities, children can practice what they know, while they learn new things. Although school environments in the study area offer opportunities for social interaction, the classroom environments and facilities seemed not to be conducive enough to facilitate effective social interaction through play among kindergarten pupils.

The socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky stressed that the social agents provide a temporary platform or support (scaffolding) through which children can accomplish a

range of tasks that are within their Zone (Zone of Proximal Development) and cannot yet handle alone. Accordingly, Vygotsky (1978) also developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), as part of the socio-cultural theory, which he defined as the distance between actual developmental levels that is determined by independent problem solving compared to the potential problem solving in the presence of an adult or more knowledgeable peer. In other words, the ZPD is the difference between what a child can learn independently and what she or he can learn with the help of a more knowledgeable and skilled partner (or peer) or adult. The term 'scaffolding' was later introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), in an attempt to explain the concept of teaching in the ZPD.

The ZPD describes the type of instructional and interactional support offered by a teacher to facilitate learning. A ZPD is known to be the range of challenges from those a child can master independently to the potential of what that child could do with the support of an adult or in collaboration with peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding includes a variety of strategies such as modelling, questioning, hint, and direction (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010). In the process of scaffolding, the teacher or an adult helps the child master a task or a concept that the child is initially unable to perform independently. As the child gains competence, the teacher lessens the support, allowing the child to work independently and complete the task (Lipscomb, Swanson & West, 2004). The ZPD increases for children as goals are accomplished and where more learning occurs (Kausar, 2010). This implies that children's level either of development increases as they learn individually or under the guidance of an adult or a more knowledgeable peer.

Vygotsky believed that for normative development to occur, both physical manipulation and social interaction needed to take place (Vygotsky, 1978). (Vygotsky,

1978). Lev Vygotsky asserted that our social context has an impact on how we think and develop (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky believed that culture influences cognition, therefore a child's social environment influences not just what he knows but how he thinks. Although Vygotsky's theory puts much emphasis on the play and learning in the socio-cultural milieu. It appeared that the classroom environment in the study settings do not fully support the use of play as a means of learning.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) supports the current study in that, Vygotsky believed children learn better, when they interact with their environment, peers or adults. This happens when the child develops the cognitive structure through a mediator. This study looks at children learning by interaction through play activities with their peers guided by their teachers. This is a practical example of the use of scaffolding, which is described as a type of instructional and interactional support offered by a teacher to facilitate learning. The selected play activities also make use of mediators in the form of teachers, peers and the items used during the activities, which enhance physical and social development off children. Interaction with the instructor and peers in the selected play activities are all key traits of the above-named theory and its propositions. This, therefore, makes the socio-cultural theory of learning an appropriate theory to be used for the study.

The socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky stressed that the social agents provide a temporary platform or support (scaffolding) through which children can accomplish a range of tasks that are within their Zone (Zone of Proximal Development) and cannot yet handle alone. He also emphasised that play promotes abstract thought that allow children to reach beyond their actual development in their cognition and self-regulation and achieve a mental representation of social roles (Essa, 2011).

Lev Vygotsky asserted that our social context has an impact on how we think and develop (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky believed that culture influences cognition, therefore a child's social environment influences not just what he knows but how he thinks. Vygotsky believed that for normative development to occur, both physical manipulation and social interaction needed to take place. One of the most recognized concepts proposed by Vygotsky is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). A ZPD is known to be the range of challenges from those a child can master independently to the potential of what that child could do with the support of an adult or in collaboration with peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Xu (2010), Vygotsky believed that the adult or more knowledgeable peer is important in helping the child's experiences in his or her environment. When a more knowledgeable child or adult is there to provide support, the child learning increases. Vygotsky's theory of learning and teaching is based on a child's relationship formed through social experiences. Vygotsky believed in social interaction which is an integral part of learning.

Social constructivism is based on the social interactions of a child in the classroom along with other peers or adult. According to Bartlett (2011), Vygotsky stressed that in the right environment, with the right guidance, children can perform successfully. For Vygotsky (1978), there are different forms of mediators: material, psychological, semiotic and other human beings. A mediator, for Vygotsky, is not only a human being such as a teacher, parent or more competent peer collaborator but can also be the tool(s) used to enhance learner understanding of the concepts covered in the teaching and learning process (Wertsch, 2007). The role of mediation in learning is therefore to transform the learners' skills from lower to higher cognitive functions as the learner progresses from prior to new knowledge forms (Kozulin, 2012). Mediated learning

experiences thus describe scaffolded learning activities during which learners are taken through the paces (Wertsch, 2007). The objective of all forms of mediation is to ensure that every function in the learner's cultural development appears on the social level, and later on the individual level or between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the learner [intra-psychological] (Vygotsky, 1978).

In play, a child always behaves beyond his/her average age, above his/her daily behaviour; in play, it is as though he/she was a head taller than himself/herself (Vygotsky, 1978) was. This passage is often quoted when describing what play can do for a child, exemplifying his/her belief that the rules of play are what define this zone of for the child. Vygotsky's theory of social culturalism created an influential shift in thinking regarding cognitive development. It allowed the teacher to be seen as an active participant with children during their play. They design the classroom environment to promote social interaction and exploration, seek ways to scaffold children's learning, and serve as a constant resource for the children. It is important for teachers to embrace their active role as co-player/co-investigator with children during play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). When teachers are active players with children, they are most likely to appreciate the benefits of play in children's development. In a nutshell, it could be extrapolated from Vygotsky's theory that learning occurs in the socio-cultural milieu where children are supported, by able peers and teachers (scaffolds), to play and learn. However, it appeared that the social agents particularly teachers in the school/classroom environment within the study settings do not fully support the use of play as a means of learning.

2.1.3. Justification for the use of the theories in the study

This theory supports the current study in that, children learn better when they interact with their environment, peers or adults. This happens when the child develops the

cognitive structure through a mediator. This study looks at children learning by interaction through play activities with their peers guided by their teachers. This is a practical example of the use of scaffolding, which is described as a type of instructional and interactional support offered by a teacher to facilitate learning. The selected play activities also make use of mediators in the form of teachers, peers and the items used during the activities, which enhance physical and social development off children. Interaction with the instructor and peers in the selected play activities are all key traits of the above-named theory and its propositions. This, therefore, makes Piaget cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning appropriate theories to be used for the study.

This theory fits into this study because through play children could actively explore their surroundings to discover knowledge. In other words, play affords children the opportunity to engage their senses in discovering the world around them. The theories are important to this study because play provides an avenue for children to explore, construct, and make meaning of the world around them. By so doing, they develop their analytic, reasoning and problem-solving skills.

2.2. Understanding of Play Activities

Generally, researchers do not agree on definitions of play. Play has been considered as a difficult concept to define. It has therefore been perceived, defined, and theorized differently by different scholars. So, the concept of play is ambiguous, complex in nature and difficult to define by researchers (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Broadhead, Wood, & Howard, 2010; McInnes et al., 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009; Ridgway, Quiñones & Li, 2015; van Oers, 2013; Wong & Logan, 2016). This is because there are a variety of theories from a multitude of disciplines (Pelligrini, 2009), and so play is regarded as an ambiguous and complex phenomenon (Wong & Logan, 2016).

Children's play has been operationalized as intrinsically motivating and self-initiated; pleasurable; freely chosen; non-literal; active engagement; opportunistic and episodic; imaginative and creative; fluid and active; and process-oriented (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). These views suggest that when children engage in play, they do it because they enjoy what they are doing; they choose how to play and what to play with by using their imagination; they engage in pretence, and are more concerned with how to play than with the outcomes of play. Taken in totality, these definitions give us a glimpse of the complex nature of children's play.

Definitions have also incorporated a range of categories of play (Pellegrini, 2009), features of play, play behaviours, types of play, and contexts of play (Wood, 2009). Notwithstanding, Fromberg (2002) viewed play as a condition of learning. She identified seven conditions of learning: play, induction, cognitive dissonance, social interaction, physical experiences, revisiting, and competence. In her view, play encourages active participation of young children in construction of meaning and hence learning. Wood (2013) adopted the six criteria Fromberg (2002) used to define play, which are "voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, rule-governed, pleasurable, and episodic" (pp. 10-12).

Play is also described as a process, activity and condition of learning as well as an instructional methodology/pedagogy (Skolnick, Hirsh-Pasek Michnick-Golinkoff, 2013; Jones & Reynolds, 2011), and mode of learning. Pedagogy is a discipline that deals with the theory, method, or practice of teaching (Oxford University Press, 2016). As a process and mode of learning, play is not only as an activity in itself, but as a way of doing something (Smidt, 2011). It is a dynamic ever-changing process that is multisensory, interactive, creative, and imaginative (Armstrong, 2011). It is active, interactive, intentional, open-ended, and concerned with process over product. It is a

particular attitude or approach to materials, behaviours, and ideas and not the materials or activities or ideas themselves; play is a special mode of thinking and doing" (McLane, 2003, p. 11). In this sense, the process of play is characterised by a non-literal 'what if' approach to thinking, where multiple ends or outcomes are possible. In other words, play generates situations where there is no one 'right' answer.

Play is also perceived as an activity. It is seen as an intelligent or cognitive activity (Piaget, 1976), social activity (Vygotsky, 1978; 2004), cultural or sociocultural activity (Gaskin, Haight & Lancy, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978; 2004), and physical or locomotor activity (Meire, 2007). Children's play is interwoven into the cultural, social, and physical fabric of everyday life (Meire, 2007).

As a cognitive activity, play is the mechanism children use to begin to interpret and to complete their world. It is regarded as a child's activity to find solutions for unrealizable desires (Vygotsky, 1978; 2004) to promote children's mental development (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011). Play is an activity that is accomplished by highly involved actors who follow some rules either implicitly or explicitly, and who have some freedom with regard to the interpretation of the rules, and to the choice of other constituents of an activity like tools, goals, et cetera (van Oers, 2013).

As a social activity, children engage in it for pleasure, recreation, rather than a serious or practical purpose. Play is a spontaneous active process in which thinking, feeling, and doing can flourish. As a leisure activity (Chowdhury & Rivalland, 2012), it is intrinsically motivated and involve active engagement and attention to the means not the ends (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2003). Child's play is a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child, and freely chosen by the child. Child's play may be boisterous and energetic, or quiet and

contemplative, light hearted or very serious. Play is the way that children stretch themselves.

As a culturally constructed concept (Göncü et al., 2006) and cultural activity (Gaskin et al., 2007), it reflects a society's values and can be used as a way to transfer values to the younger generation. Vygotskian and Post-Vygotskian definitions of play view it as a cultural practice which interacts with the social environment, in a specific location, and at a particular time (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Ridgway, Quiñones & Li, 2015; Vygotsky, 2004).

Play is also a physical or locomotor activity (Meire, 2007). It is seen as a means of working off aggression; as a means of learning basic skills of survival (as is also observable in the animal kingdom); as a means of learning social behaviour (competitive and co-operative games), as well as the commonly accepted means of relaxation. Play is considered as an active, enjoyable, informal activity that children engage in voluntarily (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

As an instructional methodology or pedagogy (Dockett, 2011; Fleer, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Pramling, Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014; Whitebread et al., 2009), play pedagogy is taken to mean teaching and learning through play, rather than learning disguised as play (Howard, 2010b) and reflects a negotiated, co-constructed practice between children and adults (Rogers, 2010). As an instructional pedagogy, it is seen as strategy for educators to use in enhancing children's skills; or make curricular goals and knowledge content accessible to children.

Play is a vehicle through which learning occurs (Howe, 2016). An intrinsically motivated, voluntary activity allows the child the opportunity to construct its own knowledge. It is an appropriate context for children learning (DEEWR, 2009; Hirsh-

Pasek et al., 2009; Pramling et al., 2014). Children utilize play to process what they observe adults doing and saying as well as to incorporate their life experiences. Play allows children to manipulate and rework ideas and concepts in relation to the interactions they have with people and materials; to formulate ideas and grow. Through play, then a child is able to synthesize his or her learning by blending the information presented in the classroom with their life experiences.

Play is fundamental in children's early learning and development (Fleer, 2013; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011). Indeed, play and learning are inseparable dimensions of children's experience (Johansson et al., 2006). Play and learning stimulate each other (Johansson et al., 2006). Children learn in and through play (Pramling et al., 2014). Play therefore could be seen as a vehicle for learning, as learning is more likely to happen if the child shows motivation towards the activity (Spitzer, 2002). Ólafsdóttir and Einarsdóttir (2017) viewed play as the child's way of learning and beneficial for child development also goes back to early theorizations of play (Marfo & Bierstecker, 2011).

In fact, play is the child's work (Ridgway et al., 2015) for relaxation (Wong & Logan, 2016). It is a relaxation tool. It is seen when educators reward children for an accomplished task with a free play period (Rogers, 2010). Play is a means to relax, and the opposite of work (Wong & Logan, 2016). Play is a child's work (Ridgway et al., 2015). Play is generally is regarded as both fun and developmentally valuable (Pellegrini, 2005; Wood & Attfield, 2005).

There certain features or characteristics of play. The characteristics of play include freedom, pretence, creativity, sense of humour, spontaneity, and problem solving (Burghardt, 2011; Smidt, 2011). These have been classified into four distinct features,

which characterize play as observed by Morgan and Kennewell (2006). First, play is child-led and voluntary, even though adults can design settings to encourage children to play. Secondly, the process of playing is more important than the product, and the process is social by its nature. The third feature regards the low risk in play: learners at play are free to observe, investigate, and enjoy small details of their environment without being afraid of failures. The final feature indicates play as having the potential to contribute both procedural and conceptual knowledge (Morgan & Kennewell, 2006). Play is focused on process (Kieff & Casberque, 2000); it is intrinsically motivated; it does not necessarily require literal interpretation; it allows for experimentation with rules; and it promotes mental activity.

According to Bob Hughes (2002), there are a number of different types of play. These include: instrumental play, real play, illicit play, pretend or symbolic or imaginative/make-believe play, dramatic play, or make believe play, locomotors play, object play, mastery play, deep play (risky play), exploratory play, fantasy play, creative play, communication play, rough and tumble play, socio-dramatic play, social play, and role play. Instrumental play is mainly a teacher-led activity having academic goals. Real play refers to children-directed, voluntary activities that may take place (for example, play during recess). Illicit play includes verbal and physical activities such as joking and fooling around. Locomotors and object play involves physical activity of the body as well as use of objects that enhance physical and motor development (Smith, 2009). Social play, which is another category of play, involves interaction with others that enhances social relationships. Pretend or symbolic play, which involves imagination or make-believe, enhances language and literacy development (Christie & Roskos, 2013; Feeney et al., 2016; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2012).

These are put into three categories of play as described by Gestwicki (2017). These are as follows: functional play, symbolic play or representational play and games with rules. Functional play, also called sensorimotor or practice play, is most common in children in the first two years of life, although it is obvious in later stages as well. With functional play, children repeatedly practice their mental schemas by interacting with objects, people, and language. Symbolic play or representational play appears at about age two and continues into adulthood. Examples of symbolic play in a kindergarten classroom would include constructive play and dramatic play. In constructive play, children use materials or objects to make other things.

Constructive play is a link between functional play and sophisticated symbolic play. Children create and construct by using concrete materials to form representational objects. In dramatic play, children create imaginary roles in which they pretend to be someone or something else. The play often draws on first or second-hand experience in various familiar situations. When two or more children are involved, such play is designated as socio-dramatic play, and the play proceeds based on the interactions between the players acting out the roles and negotiating the pretend themes. Games with rules become part of the play of school-age children and beyond. This play depends on children's understanding and agreement to use a set of prearranged rules. Logical thinking, social controls, and skills are necessary for this stage of becoming 'serious players' (Wasserman, 2000, as quoted in Gestwicki, 2017, p. 37). Examples of this type of play in a kindergarten classroom would be playing with mathematics games (for examples, board games, path games, or grid games).

There are stages of social play. These stages can be either viewed as a developmental continuum, moving from minimal involvement to maximum involvement with others, or they can be seen as particular types of play behaviour that children (pre-schoolers

and older) can be involved in, depending on the circumstance (Feeney, Moravcik & Nolte, 2016). Each stage has dominant age-specific play behaviours. These include solitary play (dominant in infancy), parallel play (typical of toddlers), associative Play (seen in most preschool-age children), cooperative play (characteristic of older preschool and kindergarten/primary-age children), and cooperative-competitive play (Hennigar, 2013).

There are a number of approaches to play (Grieshaber, 2016; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Some of the approaches include play as peripheral to learning, play as a vehicle to social and emotional development, and play as a vehicle for academic learning (Pyle & Bigelow, 2014). These approaches are derived from the teachers' perspectives as revealed in the study findings.

2.3. Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers' on Play Activities

Perception is derived from the Latin word *percipere*, which means "seize" or "understand." In general, sense, perception is an experience produced by an outside stimulation of the senses. It is a hypothesis or prognosis for action that comes into being in awareness when stimuli impinge on the organism. Perception is a cognitive process, a way of knowing about the world. It involves an interaction or transaction between an individual and his environment; the individual receives information from the external world which in some ways modifies his experience and behaviour. It is a reference of sensation to an external object. This means that it is the point where cognition and reality meet, that is information must be taken into the mind before one can do anything else with it. It describes the ways in which organisations or individuals respond to the stimulus picked by their sense organ. It is used to be thought of as something analogous to such mechanical processes as photography of an object or recording sound on a record (Burghardt, 2011).

Amissah and Agbeke (2015) defined perception as a process of building on our ill-defined and incomplete sensory experiences. It is any act or process of knowing objects, facts, and truths whether by sense, experience or by thought; it is awareness of consciousness. It can be seen from the above that almost all the definitions point to the fact that perception is a process. It is a process in that it is on-going. It occurs over a period. Different stakeholders including children, teachers, or educators, parents, and scholars or researchers hold different perspectives on play.

Several scholars (Bassok & Rorem, 2014; Freeman, 2015; Lynch, 2015), for instance, view separating play and learning in some jurisdictions. Teachers are of the view that play is important for the amusement, socialization, or physical wellbeing of children (Qadiri & Manhas, 2009), appropriate for early learning in preschool programs (Qadiri & Manhas, 2009) but not associated with academic learning as children get older (Badzis, 2003). In contrast, teachers suggest that adults could contribute to children's learning through play (Chowdhury & Rivalland, 2012). There are few studies on teachers' beliefs about play (Parsons, 2013; Peng, 2011). Findings from these studies indicate a range of play definitions offered by teachers, and a variety of perspectives on what play accomplishes for the child. Play is an enjoyable activity (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011), and a fun activity (Pearce & Bailey, 2011).

Teachers often understand play and learning as dichotomous concepts which are difficult to integrate, either in thinking or in practice (Maynard & Waters, 2007). Hence, play is often identified as a mechanical and teacher-led activity. Teachers need a new insight for play and learning, as merely increasing play possibilities in the classroom is not adequate for enhancing play and learning (Pui-Wah & Stimpson, 2004). New insight is required to relate teachers' pedagogical knowledge to play-based teaching - something which is currently limited. Teachers' pedagogical views about how they

implement play are essential in this study context. Pedagogical thinking refers to the educational decisions that teachers constantly make based on certain criteria within the school environment.

Teachers' perspectives on the nature and value of play in early childhood settings shape teachers' practices (Wood, 2010). Teachers' perceptions of play impact children are learning experiences (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson & Rogers, 2010). Thus, it is essential for preschool teachers to understand the appropriate teaching approach, such as learning through play and its role in early childhood development. Teachers support play-based curriculum framework (Thorpe et al., 2005). O'Gorman and Hard's (2013) indicated teachers' commitment to teaching values, which include opportunities for play. Teachers consider that only some school leaders are supportive of play pedagogies, and that this impacts on teachers' pedagogical approaches (Dockett, 2010).

Several researchers (Dockett, 2010; Moyles, 2010b; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013) are of the view that teachers have trouble in persuading other stakeholders of early childhood education on the use of play and play pedagogies in early childhood classrooms. To these scholars, early childhood teachers believe play to be a powerful pedagogical tool but it places extra pressure on teachers to use it for children's learning (Dockett, 2010; Moyles, 2010b). They explained further that such pressure creates tensions for teachers as to whether to facilitate and encourage learning through integrated play pedagogies (Breathnach, 2013; Breathnach, O'Gorman, & Danby, 2016; Dockett, 2010; Leaupepe, 2010; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

Pyle and Bigelow (2014) identified three play-based learning approaches: play as peripheral to learning, play as a vehicle to social and emotional development, and play as a vehicle for academic learning. These approaches are derived from the teachers'

perspectives as revealed in the study findings. Pyle and Bigelow argued that the differences in approaches highlighted challenges in integrating play into kindergarten. Other studies on teachers' perceptions of play focused on the roles assumed by teachers in integrating play in the classroom (Hyvonnen, 2011).

2.4. Instructional materials in Play Activities

Play as an instructional methodology and a vehicle or mechanism for children's learning is not commonly utilized by many teachers in standards-based classrooms. To implement play successfully, therefore, teachers need to understand the importance of play as well as their role. The early childhood teacher needs to have a clear understanding of children and how they develop to allow them the ability to control and initiate play as well as grow as independent learners (Broadhead, 2009). They also need to understand that play cannot simply occur in the classroom but requires careful teacher planning and implementation (Ashiabi, 2007).

Teachers are required to perform several roles when children play. For this reason, kindergarten teachers have several roles to carry out when utilizing play. They should act as planners, providers, scribes, participant, mediators, observers, players, leader, allower, instructional guide, storyteller, informer, assessor and evaluator or examiner (Dockett, 2011; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; McInnes et al., 2013; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015b; Pyle & Alaca, 2016; Sandberg et al., 2017). Research has identified a number of different roles for educators in children's play. These include the roles of 'stage manager', 'mediator', 'player', 'scribe', 'assessor and communicator', or 'planner' (Jones & Reynolds, 2011), as well as a passive observer role (Einarsdóttir, 2005).

Wood (2007) outlined the role of teachers in children's play to include: planning and resourcing challenging learning environments; supporting children's learning through planned play activity; extending and supporting children's spontaneous play; extending and developing children's language and communication in play; assessing children's learning through play; ensuring continuity and progression; combining adult-directed and child-initiated activities; emphasizing well-planned, purposeful play (indoors and outdoors); planning for continuity between play and work; allowing time for children to become engrossed, and work in depth; and engagement between children and adults.

Jones and Reynolds (2011) describe teachers' roles in play as being "stage manager, mediator, player, scribe, assessor and communicator as well as planner" (pp. 32-96). As stage manager is up to the teacher to provide enough space, enough materials, and enough time, by arranging the environment so the play can happen. As a mediator, he/she models and explains problem-solving skills which children can later use on their own are one of the important and effective roles of the teacher during play. As a player, he/she moves in and out of children's play to model and mediate. He/she must act as a helper, customer, visitor, and so on in order to sustain play while responding to children's ideas. As a scribe, the teacher is a collector and organizer of the data that he/she notices while observing the children at play. In addition to observing and documenting the children's play for purposes of planning and assessment, the teacher can also act as a scribe for the children, using representations, both written, and pictorial, to communicate with the children. As an assessor and communicator, he/she focuses on ongoing observations about children's abilities of what they can do instead of what they cannot do. As a planner, both adults (teachers) and children exercise initiative and make decisions, and, at the same time, meeting outcomes through play-based learning.

One of the primary roles of teachers during children's play is to act as an onlooker or observer (Broadhead, 2009; Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). These observation skills are crucial when the teacher is in the role of the observer or onlooker. While this role is passive in the actual play, it is active because the teacher is close to the children who are playing and engaged in the situation (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). While the teacher does not interact in the play other than viewing the children, she/he is not otherwise occupied. During this time, the teacher should be making notes about individual children as well as the interactions of the group. These notes are necessary for future planning, pupil assessment, to record the growth and development of the children. These notes are also the necessary data that will support the use of play in the classroom.

Children's learning through play is natural (spontaneous, unstructured) and given the opportunity to play, will allow children to discover and manipulate concepts in ways scripted lesson plans cannot. Therefore, teachers need to develop keen observational skills that enable them to notice the child manipulating concepts, as well as working through issues, both emotional and cognitive, such as how the child interacts with peers (Broadhead, 2009). If play is the means, then observation is the tool that supports its use. Those observations will yield detailed results of children's learning (Broadhead, 2009. Thus, the teacher's role in play needs to be dynamic to allow for change as the child develops and grows. As children play and become more experienced, the teacher's role will need to evolve to suit the level of the children's development.

Also, the teacher should act as a stage manager during children's play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Pyle & Alaca, 2016; Sandberg et al., 2017). Thus, educators or teachers provide guidance to children during play (Pyle & Alaca, 2016; Sandberg et al., 2017). As the stage manager, the teacher plans and organizes the classroom to allow for ample

time and materials for children to play. In addition, the teacher can interact by commenting or making suggestions which the children can accept or ignore, as the focus of play remains theirs. This is a role where the ZPD can be utilized as the teacher makes suggestions that provide scaffolding to children playing at varying levels of development.

Intentionally or not, educators regulate, interrupt, and restrict play (Rogers & Evans, 2006; Sandberg, 2002). Interrupting play has been linked with war, weapon and superhero play (Holland, 2003), and play that educators perceive as too "boisterous" (Rogers & Evans, 2006, p. 50). Children's responses to the interruptions vary. For example, in one study, children tried to convince the educators that their self-constructed 'weapons' were in fact something else (Holland, 2003). This strategy reflects what Corsaro (2003) identified as 'secondary adjustments' or 'playing the game', as the children in Rogers and Evans's (2006) study called it.

Bodrova and Leong (2009) argued that adult intervention can raise the level of children's play toward more abstract mental representations that support children's cognitive development and their literacy learning. This perspective appears to have been accepted, largely, by mainstream parents and teachers in contemporary Western cultures. Smith (2009) observed that adults are inclined to enter into children's play, encouraging certain kinds of play and channelling children's play toward educational outcomes.

Researchers have stressed the importance of teachers' roles in providing children with a quality educational setting (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). A number of studies have focused on the role of the teacher in facilitating children's learning through play and

that teacher participation in classroom playful activities encourages children's involvement in such activities (Anning & Edwards, 2006; Pugh & Duff, 2006).

According to Bondioli (2001), adult-child interaction during play activities may assist children to foster and exercise their play skills that they have yet to master or develop. Through play interactions, teachers can provide children with developmentally appropriate materials, ideas, practical achievements and support them in the development of their own thoughts and interests (Frost et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Other research studies have indicated that through play, teachers can serve as links between children and their surrounding world. Through play interactions, teachers can validate and challenge children's senses and their thoughts, which will enable children to focus on awareness, interactions, and intentions (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). In sum, play involves different kinds of teacher interactions with children and teachers have to decide on the degree of involvement in children's activities. Teachers have to observe what children are doing, support their efforts, and get involved thoughtfully to support additional learning.

According to the 'Completely Kindergarten' (2010) document, "The kindergarten teacher is a facilitator of children's play, expanding learning, extending activities, and designing the environment to support children's development - acknowledging children's independence to choose what to play and how to play will support children as they try to make sense of their world. While the element of choice is critical to the kindergarten child's development, a teacher can monitor the child's progress and achievement during play. The teacher must recognize when it is best to intervene with appropriate suggestions to scaffold learning experiences and respond to teachable moments" (p.9).

More so, the teacher should act as a parallel player (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Parallel play refers to the type of play where two children are engaged in a similar activity without interacting with each other. This role calls for the teacher to be actively engaged in play alongside the child but not directly teaching. Just as parallel play occurs among children, it can occur between the child and an adult. During this role, the teacher may comment on his or her own play, but not that of the child with whom they are parallel playing (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). This role is helpful for several reasons. First, it can benefit a withdrawn or shy child because the teacher is not directing a comment to the child's play. Therefore, that child would not have to engage verbally with anyone. Also, by engaging in their own play, the adult demonstrates that play is valued. Finally, a child may notice a new way to utilize the play material.

Another role of a teacher in children's play is to be a co-player (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). As a co-player, the teacher enters the play situation but allows the children to continue to direct it (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). The teacher interacts with the children by asking for directions or by responding to their actions or comments but does not initiate or direct the play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). The adult's (teacher) comments can be accepted or rejected by the children. This role allows a teacher to enrich the play by engaging the children in conversations which may increase the interest in the play as well as encouraging language use and development through questioning and conversation. The teacher has the ability to bring more children into the play scene through the conversations and suggestions of additional roles which fit into the play theme. This role encourages children to engage in play for a longer period and demonstrates the teacher's interest and value of play.

In addition, it is the responsibility of a teacher to play the role of a leader (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Hyvonnen, 2011). According to Heidemann and Hewitt (2010), when

teachers “become play leaders, they use their observations to more directly influence play experiences” (p. 120). During this role, the teacher is actively engaged in the play with a group or individual goal in mind. The teacher may redirect the play so that she/he is able to model a behaviour or skill. In this role however, if the children choose to ignore the modelling, the teacher will be more emphatic and change the play to allow for instruction that is more direct. This role also provides a means for introducing new materials, themes, or helping children who are having difficulty entering in to a play situation. Prior observation and notes are essential to the success of this role, as the teacher then knows the direction the play needs to move or direct modelling of skills or behaviours of children.

Moreover, the teacher must function as a play advocate during children’s play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). In today’s standards-based, assessment, and data driven society, play is not always valued by parents, administrators, or policy makers. It is the responsibility of kindergarten teachers to share their views, observations, and research findings as evidence of the value of play. To do this, teachers need to include play and the research that supports it as they develop and share their educational philosophy or when developing their lesson plans and assessments (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). They also need to share observations with parents, administrators, and other teachers to illustrate what the children are learning through play. Just as children, need additional scaffolding and assistance to play, parents, administrators, and other teachers need scaffolding in the form of research and practice sharing to understand and accept the use of play as an instructional methodology.

It is the role of a teacher to plan and execute play in the classroom. He/she should also observing to ensure safety, and act as a facilitator or tutor. As an instructional guide, the teacher plans, and sets up experiences, environment and materials learning centre

and monitor it (Saracho, 2002). He/she monitors activities, materials, and interactions to ensure learning occurs. He/she leads discussion in a literacy-play environment. As a storyteller, he/she reads story while encouraging children to participate in predicting events. As an informer, he/she provides clues to help children learn new concepts. As an examiner, he/she ask questions, monitor responses, clarify concepts in a meaningful way (using concrete experiences). The teachers' roles presented above underscore the crucial position of the teacher in the provision of classroom activities/experiences for children. However, it is also argued that adult rules limit play opportunities for children especially because of the focus on assessment of educational outcomes (Anning, 2015).

Despite evidence suggesting the significance role of adults, for example teachers, in children's play, the roles that they should play continue to be debated (Hyvönen, 2011; Leaupepe, 2010; Martlew, Stephen & Ellis, 2011). Tensions borne out of differing educational beliefs, practices and orientations (Wood, 2010) result in teachers' ambiguity as to when and how they should involve themselves in children's play (Fleer, 2013; Wood, 2010). As a result, teachers face the dichotomy of trying to challenge and develop children's conceptual understandings while, at the same time, maintaining a largely observational role with minimum input. Further complicating this are understandings of play as a child's chosen activity (Wood & Attfield, 2005) in which children should be given time and space to immerse themselves in their play using resources of their choosing. Concomitant with this idea is a view that the most significant aspect of play is the absence of direct teacher involvement, and that an activity ceases to be play once there is an intended outcome for the teacher (Broadhead, 2010; Fisher, 2010).

The role of teachers in play, whether play can or should be used for educational purposes, the power structure of play, and the intentions or outcomes of play continue

to be posed and debated (Baker, 2014; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Hunkin, 2014; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). These debates are framed within the wider context of challenges to the status quo of practice and theory in early childhood education (Fleer, Tonyan, Mantilla & Rivalland, 2009).

2.5. Contribution of Play Activities to Children Development

The importance of play in the development of children cannot be overemphasized. It contributes to the total or holistic development of children. Specifically, it contributes to the cognitive, physical or locomotors, social, cultural, emotional, and economic development of children. For these reasons, play has been identified as the foundation of early childhood education by several scholars (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a, 2019b; Leggett & Newman, 2017; Torkar & Rejc, 2017).

Cognitively, play provides a means by which children learn and develop intellectual, imaginative, logical reasoning, abstract thinking, creativity and problem solving skills as posited by several scholars (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer & Berk, 2011; Gill, 2014; Grand Fun Alley Learning Center, 2014;–Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Hyvönen & Kangas, 2010; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Keniger et al., 2013; Lynch, 2015; Ramani, 2012; Reed et al., 2012; Saskatchewan Curriculum, 2010; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Skolnick Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013; Söderström et al., 2013; Stagnitti, O'Connor & Sheppard, 2012; van Oers, 2014; Whitebread, 2010; Wu, 2014). Corroborating the views of Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978, 2004), an essential role of play is providing time, space or environment for the cognitive development of children. This means that play provides the opportunity for both a meaningful environment and a space for children to develop cognitively. Piaget explained further that children interact with materials in their environment to construct their own knowledge about the world. Vygotsky also justified those children's

interactions with people such as parents, teachers, and classmates foster cognitive development (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Thus, play provides the means for children to grow cognitively as they act upon their desires and curiosity to explore and experiment and in making discoveries about their ideas and the environment.

Intellectually, play promotes children's development of mathematical understandings (Reed, et al., 2012). In their view, play teaches mathematical thinking and skills. It allows a child to demonstrate his/her levels of cognitive and intellectual understanding. Mathematical skills are based on relationships between items, which is a concept that needs to be physically worked out by a child. It is easier for a child to rationalize these relationships through the manipulation of objects, as opposed to verbal or visual instruction.

Ginsburg, Lee, and Boyd (2008) observed that children spent over half of their play time in some form of mathematics or science activity; and mathematical play is linked to increased achievement and mathematical knowledge. Thus, play in children is a powerful tool and is a predictor of optimal early learning and future success in life (Grand Fun Alley Learning Center, 2014). Mathematical and thinking skills are incorporated into most activities children participate in without them even realizing it. Children can sort and categorize items in many different ways using colour, shape, size, or function. Children count objects along with putting them in sequence according to size. Play in the water table allows children to learn measurement, whole to part relationships, volume, and conservation of mass. Building with blocks teaches balance, weight, structure, height, and spatial positioning. Children who play with geometric pattern games and puzzles learn geometry, shapes, patterning, and logical reasoning. These skills of counting, measurement, patterns, computation, logical thinking,

geometry, and the concept of numbers are can all be taught through play activities for young children.

Play is beneficial for children's early development of mathematics and science skills, language and literacy skills, and social and self-regulatory skills (Fisher et al., 2011). The teaching and learning of science can also be promoted through play. Science is about experimentation, exploration, investigation, representation, analyzing, and thinking. All of these things can be taught to children through play scenarios. Children can mix things together and hypothesize what will happen next. Children can investigate and explore things while pretending to be a different character. Children are also able to inquire and question while they are involved in play scenarios. Play experiences in the classroom have advantages for children with relatively low self-regulation skills (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007), and that integration of play into curriculum can enhance children's ability to attend to tasks directed by the teacher (Diamond et al., 2007).

Play lays the foundation for logical mathematical thinking and stimulates "early mathematics" in children's everyday experiences (Ginsburg et al., 2008). Children come to know of informal ideas of more and less, taking away, shape, size, location, pattern and measurement (Ginsburg et al., 2008). The mathematical knowledge gained through everyday play activities seems to occur as a natural component of cognitive development, often without any adult instruction (Ginsburg et al., 2008). For example, children often count during play periods without any prompting (Ginsburg et al., 2008).

It provides children with opportunities to be creative and build-up abstract thinking in them. Play is important to children's learning because of the abstract thinking that is involved, where children attach meaning to everyday objects, a process similar to the

symbolic representation of ideas involved in reading and writing (van Oers, 2014). In addition to encouraging abstract thinking, play promotes children's problem solving and analytical reasoning (Whitebread, 2010). In the opinion of Wu (2014), play provides children with experiences that support cognitive, and language development and creativity. Through play, children have opportunities to interact with peers. Such casual interactions may promote social competence behaviours, which are necessary for later learning. The feeling of competence promotes a child's self-efficacy.

Vygotsky considered play to be a tool that the mind can use in order to facilitate children's mastery over behaviour. He held that play functions to guide children in developing self-regulation, increase the separation between thought and action, and foster the skills needed to obtain higher cognitive functioning (Vygotsky, 1978). Separation of thought and action occurs when acting and thinking are no longer used simultaneously by the child. To illustrate, this happens when the child is able to distinguish pretence from reality; for example, when children build a car with blocks, separation of thought and action occurs when they declare that they will pretend that they are building a car. Vygotsky considered this the preliminary step toward abstract thinking. When children can already exercise their minds through different play activities, they can manipulate ideas and monitor their thoughts without directly referring them to reality. The exercise of play behaviors cultivates a child's imagination and encourages creativity.

Researchers (Berk et al., 2006; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2006; Singer et al., 2006) have established that play is related to children's ability to think abstractly and to evaluate ideas from the perspectives of others. To them, play facilitates the activities of counting, sorting, sequencing, predicting, hypothesizing, or evaluating. Children play with blocks and put puzzles together to learn about relationships, size,

shapes, and coordination (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). Similarly, children who work with paints learn about relationships, colors, and cause and effect (Elkind, 2007).

Researchers (Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson & Lander, 2009) have found that children utilize play as a means of creating an understanding of the world around them. The daily exposure of children to natural environments while playing has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being, fitness levels, resilience, cognitive functioning, and motor ability (Gill, 2014; Keniger et al., 2013; Söderström et al, 2013). Lynch (2015) observed a change in the brain during play; a change that enables children to acquire new skills (both academic and social) more easily and remember them for longer.

Play fosters problem solving skills in preschool children, encourages creativity, and allows children to make sense of experience (Ramani, 2012). Wood and Attfield (2005) highlighted that through play children develop through exploration, problem solving, and investigations when playing. These include creating, observing, questioning, manipulating objects and materials, using tools, communicating, developing descriptive language, perceiving and describing, and collaborating, to name a few. Exploration often engages children with materials, toys, and props within a learning environment and invites the children into a focused investigation (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013).

Play provides an avenue for children to learn a variety of strategies such as conceptualizing, reasoning, and solving problems (Hyvönen & Kangas, 2010). This is possible particularly when children are encouraged to adopt the role of expert. In a role of expert children, believe that they are free to act according to their wishes and knowledge and they are likely to be successful in those actions. In fact, researchers (Hyvönen & Kangas, 2010) noted that children appear to seek conceptual

understanding of the essentials of appropriate strategies. Children are both problem solvers and problem generators, and seek novel challenges; they likely do so in order to naturally promote learning in play (Hyvönen, 2008b; Hyvönen & Kangas, 2007).

Play is also seen as a mechanism for linguistics or language development. Cognitively, evidence abounds that play offers children opportunities to learn language from their peers and practice what they have learned in different situations. Socio-dramatic play, for instance, is recognized as foundational to the development of language and literacy in early childhood (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2012). In other words, play builds a foundation for language and literacy development. This is because children have to learn to negotiate with one another through language and thus resolve conflicts in order to play. In addition, specific abilities in language, communication, and self-regulation also develop (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010).

Play is a natural activity for children. It assists them in problem solving and stretching their imagination, shaping their identity, and fostering self-expression (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). Children make sense of their world through play; they expand their social and cultural understandings, express personal thoughts and feelings, practice flexible and divergent thinking, encounter and solve real problems, learn to consider others' perspectives, negotiate play roles and plans, and develop self-control (Saskatchewan Curriculum, 2010). When children play, they extend their language and literacy skills, and their brain and motor development is enhanced (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Skolnick Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013).

In addition to cognitive development, play facilitates children's development of gross and fine motor skills. When they play, children are pretending; they move their bodies, create mental pictures, scenes, and needed props from existing and available materials

(Ashiabi, 2007; Ranz-Smith, 2007). Thus, play is also seen as an avenue for the physical or locomotor development of children. In other words, there are physical benefits to a child's engagement in play. This view is shared by Carlson (2012) who claimed that "The boisterous, exuberant physical play of children is more than just fun; it's a vital part of their development (para.1).

Typically, the kind of play that fosters physical development happens outdoors. The kinds of outdoor play include rough play, running, rolling, pushing, chasing, and tagging, falling, climbing, and rowdy play. It is this very physical, boisterous, large motor focused play that children seem to naturally crave (Carlson, 2011a). This leads to children developing gross motor skills that include awareness of how their bodies move as well as how to control these movements (Carlson, 2011a; 2011b). Neuroscience has suggested a connection between physically active play and the brain's ability to self-regulate impulsivity in pre-schoolers (Brown, 2009; Panksepp, 2007).

Play develops children's physical coordination and muscular strength. Play is satisfying in its own right. In play, children learn to navigate their physical and social environment, while also imagining and constructing new realities. Piaget (1936) emphasized how children in the preoperational stage of development learn best through hands-on manipulation; play allows children to manipulate objects and the environment directly around them (Singer et al., 2006). It follows that with ample opportunity to play, children will be better equipped to successfully and appropriately handle conflicts that occur in the classroom.

Physical play is a critical part of young children's development as they grow into strong, healthy, and attentive students. Young children are still developing attentional skills, so recess provides the needed respite enabling them to re-enter the classroom refreshed

and ready to attend (Falk, 2012; Levin, 2013; Madaus & Lee-St. John, 2012). Play promotes physical health and wellbeing of children. Besides the obvious health benefits of active play, especially active play in an outdoor setting, play facilitates physical (gross and fine motor) development of children.

Gross motor development is supported during the primary years though active play and repeated use of the large muscles. Students' movements become more coordinated and they develop a better awareness of body, space, and direction as they climb, swing, run, jump, catch, throw, and engage in vigorous physical activities, both indoors and out. Fine motor development is refined during the primary grades as students cut, glue, lace, button, paint, sculpt, print, draw, build with blocks (large and small), engage in sensory play, put together puzzles and structures, etcetera.

Another basis for learning through play lies in embodiment, where the whole body is used in play and in learning processes. Embodiment refers to combining various physical actions with higher cognitive activities like thinking, reasoning, perceiving and reflecting (Price & Rogers, 2004). Physicality, overall, is seen as being important for children's wellbeing and academic achievement; for that reason, it is recommended that physical approaches to learning be applied across the curriculum (DuBose et. al., 2008). Therefore, learning through play is not merely a cognitive but also a cultural, emotional, social, and physical process (Hyvönen, 2008b).

Psychologists inform us that play is not just a filling in of an empty period, or just a relaxation or leisure activity, but it is an important learning experience. The notion which is widely held globally is that, children can learn through play. The idea of learning through play is highly valued by scholars and educators (Wu, 2014). There is a growing body of evidence supporting the many connections between play and

learning and development. Nevertheless, researchers point to a lack of play and playful methods in schools and early childhood education (Bergen, 2009; Pui-Wah, 2010), particularly the poor integration of play with the curriculum (Lord, & McFarland, 2010). Researchers have also questioned the quality of play (Hujala et al., 2010) and the opportunities for playful learning environments that have been missed (Maynard & Waters, 2007). Pramling, Samuelsson, and Carlsson (2008) are concerned about insufficient integration, claiming that in preschool the act of learning (how children play) has, so far, been much more the focus than the object of learning (what children learn).

Children's play promotes their social and emotional development. A number of school scholars give credence to the social benefits of play for children (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2013; Cooper, 2015; Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014; Frost & Sutterby, 2017; Fung & Cheng, 2017; Gestwicki & Bertrand, 2011; Goncu & Gaskins, 2011; Howard, 2010; Kuschner, 2012; Howard & McKinnes, 2012; Leggett & Newman, 2017; Li, Hestenes & Wang, 2016; Lindsey & Colwell, 2013; Lynch, 2015; Meacham, Vukelich, Han & Buell, 2016; Pyle & Bigelow, 2014; Reed, et al., 2012; Roskos & Christie, 2011; Stagnitti et al., 2012; Veiga, Neto & Reiffe, 2016; Veiga et al., 2017; Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule & Trew, 2010).

Comparing the above claims to the views of Stagnitti et al. (2012), Lindsey, and Colwell (2013), play is a tool that boosts children's affective social competence (ASC). They described ASC as a concept that 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 prosocial behaviour. They further explained ASC more

narrowly as the ability to send and receive affective messages, and the ability to feel affect (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013; Stagnitti et al., 2012). Regardless of how it is defined, ASC 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 ASC skills. Building on the work of developmental theorists Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978; 2004), they hypothesized that children who participate in pretend play have more opportunities to practise perspective-taking and can better understand the emotions of others (Lindsey &Colwell, 2013). In other words, children learn through play to send and receive affective messages and experience affect. Play enables children to explore the customs and roles of their direct community, to reflect upon their inner selves and their emotions, and to develop communication skills. Through play, children interact and engage with the world around them, practicing adult roles, and conquering fears, all while building new competencies that lead to increased confidence and resiliency to face challenges in the future. Researchers (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014; Li et al., 2016)) argued that because children practise these ASC 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.

Research supports the need for play to promote growth in affective social competence (ASC) and peer relations (Fung & Cheng, 2017; Meacham et al., 2016; Veiga et al., 2016). The development of these positive social skills has another benefit; when children learn to self-regulate, disruptive behaviours in the classroom appear to decrease. The researchers concluded that because social competence is such an important skill for young children to develop, the need for play must not be ignored.

Play creates the environment and the circumstances necessary to build not only critical social and emotional skills, but also self-regulation in young children. Self-regulation is reflected in the preschool years as children show signs of patience by refraining from running after desired objects or by offering help to other children. Achieving self-regulation at an early age can thus equip children to meet complex challenges, which range from the day-to-day academic and social requirements of school to decision making on larger social issues in the later years (Frost et al., 2008). Self-regulation leads to opportunities for children to learn how to work in groups learn how to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and become emotionally stronger (Ginsberg, 2007). By this claim, playing together with friends allows children to exercise self-control and develop what they already know, take turns, cooperate, and socialise with others. In other words, children's play leads to the formation of balanced self-regulation. Drawing on the views of Reed et al. (2012), play fosters the development of social skills, relationships, and emotional stability for school success.

Children learn so much from play as it teaches them social skills such as sharing, taking turns, self-discipline and tolerance of others. This view is shared by Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey (2005) who averred that through play children's cooperation and co-learning is extended in preschool. The social interactions within play facilitate joint meaning making, as children test out, explain, and enact their perspectives and understandings, at the same time as they encounter those of others. Social interaction in play provides support for the challenges children often construct in play, creating opportunities for innovation, risk taking, and problem solving. Such interactions also underpin mathematical thinking.

Play fosters cooperation or collaboration among children. Considering the views of some researchers (Bodrova et al., 2013; Lynch, 2015), play offers children the

opportunity to work better with their peers and solve social problems. They believed that children benefit socially from free play. Lynch postulated that because children have an intrinsic motivation for play, robbing them of that outlet will lead to a decrease in social competencies. The ability to get along with others and to self-regulate is important skills for prekindergarten children to learn before they reach primary grades. As the child progresses through each grade the expectation for attending to large group lessons for longer periods of time increase. In buttressing this point, Veiga et al. (2017) stated that the play environment and quality of the play interactions have a greater effect on social outcomes than any one type of play. For this reason, they cautioned that the importance of free, unstructured play time should not be overlooked in this era of replacing play with academics (Veiga et al., 2017).

Play also allows children of varying developmental levels to communicate during an activity or imaginative scenario. Play enables children to learn language skills which help them understand that words represent experiences (Roskos & Christie, 2011). In play, children communicate and interpret continuously in the negotiation with peers and role play. At the same time as they act the play, they produce the content of it by talking about what to do and in what way it should be done, that is, the meta-communicative approach children take in their play. Through play, children can make choices, and enhance their social skills, and so on. They are able to re-enact stories they have heard, role play, and write during play, creating lists, maps, notes, or signs. Communication thus becomes purposeful and meaningful. Through these interactions, they are able to experiment with oral and written language in non-threatening ways. This nexus is the point where play, language, and literacy meet and create a learning space in the classroom. This nexus is especially apparent in dramatic play areas because of the focus on pretend play, when children are acting out stories, using objects to stand

for other objects, and building on what they already know to deepen their knowledge and pull their thinking forward (Roskos & Christie, 2011).

Play contributes to emotional development of children. In other words, play supports the development of self-regulation and emotional development. It helps students with anxiety, frustration, normal developmental conflicts, traumatic situations, unfamiliar concepts, and overwhelming experiences. As well, play gives children numerous opportunities to feel good about themselves. This is because there is no right or wrong way to play, children have successful experiences that positively influence their self-concept (Henniger, 2013). For these reasons, play is therapeutic.

Outdoor play influences children's development by contributing to fostering values, attitudes, skills, and behaviours towards themselves, others, and their environment, many early learning and child care programs are challenged to provide intriguing and stimulating outdoor environments (Cooper, 2015; Frost & Sutterby, 2017; Leggett & Newman, 2017). Play also supports diversity and cultural differences as children are introduced to the rich and diverse cultural traditions of other races (Grossman, 2004).

As summarised by Henniger (2013), the specific benefits include intellectual growth, multisensory experiences, effective problem solving, mastering abstract symbolism, creativity, social skills acquisition, decreasing egocentrism, language and literacy development, and numeracy development. These developmental domains (cognitive, physical, social, and emotional) are positively influenced when children are allowed opportunities to be physically active (Goldfield et al., 2012; Serpentino, 2011). Disappointingly, a large number of educators do not provide adequate time for physical activities.

Play is often considered a central learning approach within pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. Thus, play is the primary mode of learning that fosters independence in the child while being guided by an educator (Walsh et al., 2010). Thus, providing students time to play provides opportunities for children to explore and create deeper levels of thinking through building literacy skills, manipulating objects, building relationships, exploring real and imaginary perspectives, and having a choice in their learning.

2.6. Challenges Kindergarten Teachers Face in the use of Play Activities

There are a number of barriers that teachers claim keep them from providing time for their pupils to be physically active through play. These barriers include not having the proper and adequate equipment and materials for play, not having enough space to be active, not enough time in the schedule, and having too many pupils to teach. Most teachers believed these barriers do not offer their pupils the time and opportunity to play (Beighle & Morrow, 2014; Sharma et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2011; Webster, Erwin & Parks, 2013).

Some teachers have inadequate knowledge of the benefits of play to children's growth, development, and learning. Thus, a lack of knowledge of the importance of physical activity by means of play may be a barrier teachers have in regard to providing physical in addition to academic work (Parrish, Yeatman, Iverson & Russell, 2012). Besides, some teachers also punish children for various reasons by not allowing them to participate in physical activities through play (Parrish et al., 2012).

In addition to the inadequate knowledge of the benefits of play to children, some teachers are unprepared to design or plan and implement play-based activity lessons (Fletcher, Mandigo, & Kosnik, 2013; Mwonga & Wanyama, 2012; Sandseter, 2012;

Robinson et al., 2012). Due to the inadequate training in play-based pedagogy and their unpreparedness, teachers are not willing to plan and implement play-based lessons. Copeland et al. (2012) discovered in their study that a number of teachers hold the belief that children are out of control children when they are being allowed to play and; therefore, prefer not to allow or give ample opportunities for children to play.

Poor attitudes of some parents, headteachers and other sakeholders to children's play is a barrier to the effective implementation of play-based instruction and learning in schools. Froehlich-Chow and Humbert (2011) found that a lack of awareness and support from caregivers and parents make it difficult for teachers to provide opportunities for children to play. In a study by Kerkez, Tutal, and Akcinar (2013), it was found that parents believed their children were active enough and did not need to spend more time being physically active in school. They believed their children would get sweaty and possibly injured if physically active and preferred they not engage in such activities.

There are challenges to the integration of play-based learning and play pedagogy in schools despite the recognition that play offers a lot of benefits to children (Fleer, 2013; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Moyles, 2010a). Accordingly, the provision of play to children remains a challenge while adult-led activities dominate (Howard, 2010a). Other challenges relate to the push-down of formalised pedagogical approaches in the early years of schooling (Cochran, 2011). The prioritising of more traditional subjects such as literacy and numeracy and a focus on deliverable outcomes with standardised testing and reporting (Yelland, 2010) points to the increasing trend of constructing curriculum focused on outcomes-based learning in contrast to child-responsive practices common in non-compulsory settings in the past.

The traditional pedagogical approach evident in education settings in many countries is typically formal and didactic with a focus on the mind (Moss & Petrie, 2002; OECD, 2006). Concerned those didactic approaches are ill-suited to the natural learning strategies and psychology of young children. A social pedagogy approach views children holistically, focusing on the mind, body, creativity, emotions, and socio-cultural identity (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Despite the historical emphasis on play as a pedagogical approach (Gunnarsdottir, 2014; Lindstrand & Björk-Willén, 2016), there is a shift away from play-based, child-centred practices towards formal, explicit teaching and emphasis on formal academic outcomes. The net effect of the challenges to the provision of play has resulted in the devaluing of play pedagogies (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010), and an increased demand for formal learning practices (Breathnach, 2013).

The very nature of the primary school culture can inhibit a teacher's opportunity and desire to provide a more child-directed, active learning program. Hännikäinen, and Rasku-Puttonen (2010) comment on the contrast in the learning environments between a pre-school and primary classroom noting that in 'traditional' primary school cultures children find it difficult to engage in more participatory activities and discussions because teachers use more formal instruction, teacher organised learning activities and compulsory curriculum and standardised achievement.

Large class sizes are also a barrier to the implementation of play0based instruction and learning in schools. A higher teacher-child ratios and less resourced kindergarten classroom environments is a barrier to a play-based programme to emerge in schools. This view was echoed by other researchers (Martlew, Stephen & Ellis, 2011; Stephen, 2010).

The quality and benefits of children's play are highly susceptible to the environments in which it occurs. Children's play can be compromised by extreme and toxic stressors brought about through the actions or inaction of adults. Wherever children's right to play is negatively impacted there are consequences for children's health, development and well-being (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013).

Another challenge is the reduction or elimination of time for children's play by teachers and the reliance on a scripted curriculum designed to prepare children for formal learning and assessments (Carlsson-Paige, & Levin, 2010). For the implementation of play pedagogies, educators face many other challenges, including:

i. adults' understanding of the complexity of play (Wood, 2010);
ii. differentiating and connecting notions of play, learning, freedom and choice (Dockett, 2011; Wu & Rao, 2011);
iii. justifying play-based approaches (Dockett, 2011; Wood, 2010);
iv. confronting developmental discourses that place the adult in a privileged role with control and power over the child (Wood, 2010);
v. integrating play-based learning and intentional teaching into their practice as complementary, rather than binary concepts (Thomas et al., 2011); and
vi. balancing their own understandings and beliefs about play with the expectations of curriculum documents (Marfo & Bierstecker, 2011).

In order to mitigate these challenges, Rogers and Evans (2007) suggested some important considerations to facilitate the use of play-based instruction and learning strategies in the classroom. Predominantly these include the inclusion of more space and time for play where a more creative and flexible use of indoors space would challenge an overabundance of traditional desk top activities and allow for the facilitation of child choice within the learning programme. A teacher's observations of

children's play preferences and interests, even in junior primary classrooms could provide ideas that would extend and motivate their play and stimulate engagement in learning. Besides, Rogers and Evans (2007) noted the use of the outdoors would offer greater choice and availability of materials and space as another area that could be considered by schools and classroom teachers. They suggested that for these inclusions to take place, teachers need to recognise the value of play and its contribution to learning (Rogers & Evans, 2007).

2.7. Summary of Literature Review

This chapter summarizes review of the literature. Essentially, the review was rooted in the theoretical constructs of Piaget's (1948, 1962) cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory. Central to Piaget's and Vygotsky's theory is the idea that children construct knowledge and learn through play. The review clearly indicates that conceptualizing and defining play is complex, difficult, and confusing to scholars. So, the concept of play is ambiguous, complex in nature, and difficult to define and theorized by researchers. Generally, teachers have diverse opinions and beliefs about play. In some jurisdictions, teachers separate play and learning. They understand play and learning as dichotomous concepts which are difficult to integrate, either in thinking or in practice. Accordingly, teachers' perspectives on the nature and value of play in early childhood settings shape teachers' practices. For this reason, teachers need to understand the importance of play as well as their role.

The literature review discusses several roles of teachers when children play, and when utilizing play as an instructional pedagogy. It unfolds from the review that teachers should act as planners, providers, scribes, participant, mediators, observers, players, leader, instructional guide, storyteller, informer, assessor and evaluator or examiner. Thus, teachers play many important roles in the use of play at school either in the

classroom or out of the classroom (outdoor). Today, children enter kindergarten with more academic than play experiences; therefore, the teacher's role needs to be fluid with first being a keen observer to identify when and how she should act. That observation guides the additional roles and remains a necessary component of each one. Throughout the day, the teacher needs to be able to flow in and out of all of these roles to successfully utilize play as an instructional modality. For these reasons, the role of the teacher is integral to supporting children's learning and development. This is because teachers provide support (that is, scaffold) to extend the duration and complexity of children's play as well as encourage children to incorporate language, literacy, and numeracy within their play. When teachers consider individual children's abilities, interests and preferences, they create an environment that is engaging for all. Despite evidence suggesting the significance role of adults, for example teachers, in children's play, the roles that they should play continue to be debated.

The review cited a lot of benefits of play to children. It becomes evident from the review that play contributes to the cognitive, physical or locomotors, social, emotional, and cultural development of children. Much research from educational psychology, child development, and neuroscience show the benefits of play in the cognitive, social, emotional, as well as physical development of children. When children play, they are experiencing benefits in all developmental domains. As summarised by Okoruwa (2016), the physical benefits include better vision, more motor fitness, better coordination, and immunity. Cognitive benefits include enhanced long term memory, improved academic performance, problem solving, and creative thinking skills. Socio-emotional benefits include greater levels of cooperation, conflict resolution and leadership skills, independence and autonomy as well as minimized anxiety and

aggression. Children must not be denied these important experiences and benefits. In this regard, play should be a significant part of a kindergarten classroom.

The review identified a number of barriers that teachers claim keep them from using play-based instruction and learning, as well as providing time for pupils to play. These barriers include but not limited to: not having the proper and adequate equipment and materials for play, not having enough space, not enough time in the school/classroom schedules, and having too many pupils to teach (high teacher-pupil ratio due to large class sizes), inadequate knowledge of the benefits of play to children's growth, development and learning, unpreparedness to design or plan and implement play-based activity lessons. Thus, there are challenges to the integration of play-based learning and play pedagogy in schools despite the recognition that play offers a lot of benefits to children. Other challenges relate to the push-down of formalised pedagogical approaches in the early years of schooling. Another challenge is the reduction or elimination of time for children's play by teachers and the reliance on a scripted curriculum designed to prepare children for formal learning and assessments. Finally, the review cited poor attitudes of some parents, head teachers and other stakeholders to children's play as a barrier to the effective implementation of play-based instruction and learning in schools.

In order to mitigate these challenges, Rogers and Evans (2007) suggested some important considerations to facilitate the use of play-based instruction and learning strategies in the classroom. These include teacher recognition of the value of play and its contribution to learning; the inclusion of more space and time for play in indoor and outdoor classroom environment; and adult (teacher) support or scaffold and observations of children's play preferences and interests.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0. Overview

This chapter discusses the method which was used to carry out the study. It includes the research paradigm, research design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, validity and reliability of data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research Paradigm

This research which is underpinned by the pragmatic paradigm. Pragmatic paradigm goes in line with the mixed method approach. It combines both positivists and interpretivism' paradigms to seek generalization and help to construct meaning the research participants give on the field during data collections. Pragmatism arises out of actions, situations and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell, 2009).

In the context of this study, the maxim of pragmatism is merely the combination of the ideas of interpretivism-positivist philosophical approach that requires proper and accurate statistical methodology that aims at reaching meaningful results with value in real life not just focusing on the statistical significance of the difference between numbers (Westfall, Mold & Fagnan, 2007). The pragmatic paradigm implies that the overall approach to research is that of mixing data collection procedures and analysis within the research process. In other words, pragmatism is concerned with what works when finding solutions to a problem, instead of strict adherence to positions as with positivism and interpretivism. Consequently, the emphasis is not solely on methods, but also on the research problem and employs all approaches available to understand the problem. The philosophical perspective of pragmatic approach is relevant for this study because the pragmatic approach ensures methodological congruence in the investigation of the research questions and hypotheses, as well as the choice of methods for data collection and analysis.

3.2. Research Design

This research employed the concurrent nested mixed method design where the quantitative method is dominant to the qualitative method. In other words, the qualitative method is embedded or nested within the quantitative approach. Here, the research question to be answered by the embedded method was of a secondary nature and addresses a very specific subtopic that is connected with the general research questions. The researcher collected and analyzed data, integrate the findings, and draw inferences using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a programme of study as noted by Creswell (2008). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) argued that mixed methods research uses a method and philosophy that attempt to fit

together the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative research into a workable solution.

The study employed the concurrent mixed method design in relation to the objectives of this study (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This approach requires the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or at the same time, and analyse them at the same time (Creswell, 2014). Thus, in this approach, one set of data complements the other, helping to overcome any weakness associated with each other (Creswell, 2014). This design helps to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Dzakadzie, 2017).

However, a mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed for the study. The quantitative data provided the initial picture of the research problem, while the qualitative analysis explained the larger picture of the research problem and provided an in-depth assessment of the case in the respondent environment. The purpose of the quantitative data was to provide a numeric description that may be generalized to the specific population. Specifically, quantitative data was important because they help generalize the play activities among pre-schoolers in kindergarten schools within the Sangnarigu Municipality. The qualitative data were important to the study since it provided first-hand information about the strategies used to manage the classroom in individual school contexts. Also, the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone (Creswell, 2014).

3.3. Population of the study

According to Waltz, Strickland, and Lenz (2015), population refers to the entire aggregation of cases that meet a determined set of criteria. The target population of the study was all teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality. The accessible population of the study was all kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality. There were one hundred and forty (140) kindergarten teachers in the ten circuits within the Sangnarigu Municipality. This comprised fifteen (15) males and one hundred and twenty-five (125) female teachers.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sampling is selecting a few respondents out of some larger grouping for the study (Walts, Strickland, & Lenz, 2015). Sampling allows the researcher to study a workable number of cases from the larger group to derive findings that are relevant for all members of the group. The sample size for the study was one hundred and forty (140) participants. Participants were sampled through census and purposive sampling techniques. Census sampling is a probability sampling technique whereby all the units or members of a population are selected for study. It is a probability sampling technique whereby the population is sub-divided into clusters or geographical units from which the samples are selected. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique described as “selection of units based on personal judgment rather than randomization” (Elder, 2009, p.6).

For the quantitative data, census sampling technique was used for the selection of the kindergarten teachers to response to the questionnaires. First, all the public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality were put into clusters of ten (10) school circuits. Second, in each school circuit, all the kindergarten teachers were selected through census technique. In all one hundred and forty (140) public kindergarten

teachers from the ten school circuits. Census selection was applied in selecting all the 140 public kindergarten teachers since the accessible population of the public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipal is deemed small. The census was used because the information was collected from all kindergarten in the district. With census technique, every respondent within the study area was selected for the data collection (Creswell, 2009).

One of the major advantages of the census method is the accuracy as each and every unit of the population is studied before drawing any conclusions of the research. When more data are collected, the degree of correctness of the information also increases. Also, the results based on this method are less biased (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Again, census method can be applied in a situation where the separate data for every unit in the population is to be collected, such that the separate actions for each are taken. This method can be used where the population is comprised of heterogeneous items, i.e. different characteristics (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Though the census method provides a complete data of the population under study, it is very costly and time-consuming. Often, this method is dropped down because of these constraints and the sampling method, where certain items representative of the larger group, is selected to draw the conclusions (Creswell, 2009).

For the qualitative data, purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of the kindergarten teachers to response to the interview guide questions. A criterion was used to select kindergarten teachers for the interview. The criterion was based on kindergarten teachers who had taught for 8 years at the early childhood centre in the same school circuit. The researcher purposively selected those kindergarten teachers. In all, ten (10) kindergarten teachers met that criterion. The choice of 10 as sample size

for the interview is based on Creswell's (2007) assertion that qualitative studies require detailed and extensive work so the sample size should be relatively small and manageable. Silverman (2013) also corroborated that a sample of 6-15 interviews for qualitative studies may be sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations especially for studies with a high level of homogeneity among the populations.

Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most. Patton (2015) stated, "Purposeful sampling involves studying an information-rich case in depth and detail to understand and illuminate important cases rather than generalizing from a sample to a population" (p. 563). In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the bases of their judgment of their typically or particularly knowledgeable about the issues under study. This means that, in purposive sampling, the researcher chooses subjects who in his/her opinion is thought to be relevant to the research topic. This was the bases for the selection of the ten (10) out of the one hundred and forty (140) kindergarten teachers for this study.

A smaller sample was selected for the qualitative phase because, it is manageable and in the qualitative study it is necessary to select a small sample that would enable the phenomenon under study to be explored for a better understanding (Creswell, 2008). Creswell further asserted that selecting a large number of respondents would result in superficial perspectives and the ability of the researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data for the study.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

A self-constructed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from respondents for the study. The respondents who answered the questionnaire were public kindergarten teachers. A questionnaire is a research tool through which respondents are asked to respond to similar questions in a predetermined order (Gray, 2004). The questionnaire was used because it reduces bias that might result from the personal characteristics of the researcher. Questionnaire offers the chance for privacy since the respondents could complete them at their own convenience enhances increasing the validity of the data.

In spite of the strengths, the use of questionnaires in studies has its own limitations. The majority of people who receive questionnaires do not return them (Denscombe, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). With respect to low response rate, the researcher curtailed it by appealing to the participants' goodwill, explaining the rationale of the study to them, and assuring them that their responses will be in private and confidential, as well as self-administering of the questionnaires by the researcher. In order to ensure that respondents answer the questionnaire, the researcher kept the self-constructed questionnaires short, using simple and clear language, keep the respondents' task simple, provided clear instructions and made the self-constructed questionnaire attractive and professional looking. At the quantitative phase, a four point Likert-type scale and closed-ended questions were used to sample respondents' view for the study.

The questionnaire was divided into five main sections. In Section A, closed-ended items were used to sample respondents' background information. Section A (questions 1-5)

elicits background information on: gender, class taught, class size, highest academic qualification, and number of years of teaching in kindergarten. Section B (1-9) solicits information on teacher perceptions of play activities. Section C (1-8) dwells on instructional practices of teacher in play activities. Section D (1-11) is designed to solicit information on the role of play activities in the development of pupils. Section E (1-9) looks for information on challenges kindergarten teachers' face when implementing play activities. In all, the questionnaire contained forty-two (42) items. With closed-ended questions, respondents are given a set of pre-designed replies such as "agree" or "disagree" or are given the opportunity to choose from a set of numbers representing strengths of feeling or attitude (Gray, 2004). Closed-ended question items have a number of advantages. For example, data analysis from closed-ended questions is relatively simpler and questions can be coded quickly. Closed-ended questions require no extended writing thereby saving the respondent's time.

3.5.2 Interview

A interview guide was used to collect the qualitative data. In semi-structured interviews, researchers must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes appropriate to the central purpose of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The semi-structured interview schedule was useful for gathering information from the ten (10) teachers to help understand the quantitative data. A semi-structured interview was a useful instrument for the study because it gave the researcher opportunity to seek clarification from the respondents. However, the openness of some of the questions in the interview schedule led to the gathering of massive volumes of qualitative data.

3.6. Pilot Testing

A pilot test was conducted prior to the actual study. The pilot testing was conducted using 12 public kindergarten teachers at Tamala Mentro. The pilot testing helped the researcher to familiarize herself with the questionnaire and interview questions. More importantly, the pilot test was done to check for clarity and coherence of the questions asked as well as the duration of the administration of the questionnaire and interview**.** The pilot test was conducted as a small scale version or trial towards the preparation for a major study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). This pilot test was important to determine if the data collection instruments would yield the needed results of the actual research and to check the validity and reliability.

The findings from the pilot test allowed the researcher to rework on the research instruments for the improvement of objectives to capture the study variables adequately, correcting grammatical errors that had not been seen. For example, the item on *"Work experience"* of the teacher which was used for the pilot test was reframed as *"How long, in years, have you been teaching kindergarten?"* for the actual study. This was done because the first question was ambiguous or unclear to the participants who took part in the pilot study. The pilot test lasted for a period of one week.

3.7. Validity and Reliability of Data Collection Instruments

3.7.1. Questionnaire

Validity was ensured by assessing the questionnaire items during their construction using content and face validity. Validity is the extent to which research instruments measure what they are intended to measure (Bryman, 2006). For face validity, the instruments were given to colleague Master of Philosophy students of the Department of Early Childhood Education in the University of Education, Winneba for scrutiny and

peer review. For content validity, the instruments were given the supervisor and early childhood coordinators for expert review. They scrutinised the items for their suitability before pre-test. Content validity is a measuring instrument which gauges whether there has been adequate coverage of the investigative questions guiding the study (Creswell, 2003). It indicates that the technique assesses or measures what it is supposed to measure (Creswell, 2009). It is a judgmental assessment on how the content of a scale represents the measures.

In this study, reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach Alpha that is the most common means of testing internal consistency of the items, using the SPSS software package version 26.0, through a pilot test that was conducted with 12 public kindergarten teachers that was not part of the main work. In this study, internal consistency was tested on the questionnaire by means of Cronbach alpha statistics with the help of SPSS software version 26. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) of 0.72 which is deemed as an acceptable measure of reliability because this is above the 0.70, the threshold value of acceptability as a measure of reliability as noted by (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). This result implies that the instrument was reliable; hence, it was used for the actual study.

3.7.2. Interview Guide

In order to make my research findings convincing and trustworthy, I considered the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability while conducting interviews (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility, which can replace internal validity, I recorded the interviews for accurate interpretations and used member checks techniques as suggested by Teddie and Tashakkori (1998) and Singh (2007). After transcribing the interviews, I provided each interviewee with the transcribed version

and the corresponding recorded interview to check that the transcriptions are identical to what they said in their interviews.

Transferability, which should replace external validity, was addressed by providing thick description of the situation studied and documenting all steps of research. The explicit description of my research process, methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation highlights the detailed steps of my research and provides a thick description of the whole research process. Dependability or reliability was increased in my study in two different ways. First, I used the same interview guide that has been carefully designed, worded, and piloted while conducting interviews. Second, I transcribed the interviews accurately and provided interviewees with the transcribed versions for verification.

Confirmability, which should replace objectivity, was achieved by auditing and triangulation. Two external audits (my supervisor and one head teacher) examined both the process and product of the research study. In addition to reviewing questionnaires and interview guide before and after piloting, they helped with evaluating whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by data. While acknowledging the subjective nature of interpretive research, I tried to present a detailed, accurate, and non-biased account of participants' views.

3.8. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood Education in the University of Education, Winneba to facilitate the process of data collection. Research permit from the Sangnarigu Municipal Education Office was sought before embarking on data collection.

The administration of the questionnaire lasted for four school weeks. A maximum of seven (7) schools were covered each day for the field work. In each school, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the respondents. The respondents were given instructions by the researcher on how to complete the questionnaire. Forty (40) minutes was used for the distribution and answering of the questionnaire. The various sub-headings of the questionnaire were discussed with the respondents. All items in the questionnaire were duly filled up by the respondents and returned for final analysis.

The interview was personally conducted on the selected kindergarten teachers. The interview took the form of face-to-face interaction with the teacher participants. The interview focused on the content specified by the research objectives for a systematic description, prediction, or explanation of the phenomenon under study as stated by Bryman (2006). Semi–structured interview guide was used to gather information. Interviewing was employed as a data collection technique because the researcher values contact with key players who can provide privileged information. Though the interview was time consuming, it helped both the researcher and the respondents to clarify issues.

3.9. Data Analysis Procedure

Data that was collected through questionnaire was analysed and interpreted in the light of the study objectives. The completed questionnaires which were retrieved from respondents were first numbered, edited, and coded. Since almost all the items were on five point Likert-type scale, they were scored 1, 2, 3 4 and 5 for items with responses; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agreed nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Coded responses were keyed into SPSS version 26 software for quantitative data

analysis. Frequencies, percentages, and mean were used to analyse bio-data of respondents and research questions 1 to 4.

The interview data in this study was analysed following thematic analysis procedure. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality. The interview data was transcribed, organized, coded, and analysed for the report written. Thus, the analysis of data that was obtained from interviews was done by identifying common ideas from the respondents 'and description of their experiences. Irrelevant information was separated from relevant information in the interview notes.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

The researcher executed all ethical procedures practice by researchers in conducting research including the following:

Avoided plagiarism: Works of people (scholars and researchers) which were used to buttress analysis of and in the literature review, were duly acknowledged in-text and listed in the reference section.

Informed consent: In order, not to violate the principle of informed consent as recommendation in the social research, letters of introduction were sent to the Municipal Director of Birim Central Municipality and head teachers of sampled schools to seek permission before the conduct of the research. In these letters, the purpose of the study was clearly stated to the respondents (teacher participants), head teachers, and the Municipal Director of Education. The consent of the participants was sought to participate in the study.

Assured confidentiality: The respondents were assured that their identities would be concealed. In achieving this purpose, respondents were given numbers which they

wrote on their questionnaire sheets instead of their names. This made it difficult for people to identify the respondents. Individual respondents were assured of voluntary withdrawal from the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0. Overview

This study investigated the views of Early Childhood Educators on play in public kindergartens in the Sangnarigu Municipality. This chapter presents the results of the data collected from the respondents. The results have been organised, presented, and discussed under the following themes:

i. Demographic information on kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality.
ii. Teachers' perceptions of play.
iii. The instructional practices of teachers in play activities.
iv. The roles or benefits of play in the development of pupils.
v. The challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities.

4.1. Demographic data on kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality

The demographic data of the respondents cover the following attributes: gender, highest level of education, class/level taught, teaching experience with regard to years of teaching kindergarten, and number of pupils in class (class size).

Table 4.1: Demographic Data on the Respondents (n = 140)

Variable	Variable category	F	%
1. Gender	Male	15	11
	Female	125	89
2. Educational qualification	MPhil in Early Childhood Education	0	0
	B.Ed in Early Childhood Education	11	8
	Diploma in Early Childhood Education	90	64
	Certificates in Early Childhood Education	39	28
2. Class/level taught	KG 1	54	39
	KG 2	86	61
4. Teaching experience (yrs.)	1-3	117	84
	4-6	11	8
	7-10	12	9
	11 and above	0	0
5. Class size (number of pupils)	Below 20	0	0
	20-29	0	0
	30-39	24	17
	40-49	52	37
	50+	64	46

Source: Fieldwork data (2023)

Key: F = Frequency; **%** = Percentage; **n** – sample

Table 4.1 revealed that there were more female (n=125, 89%) than male respondents (n=15, 11%) took part in the study. The result suggests that there are more female kindergarten teachers in basic schools within the Sangnarigu Municipality. The distribution of the respondents by their academic and professional qualification revealed that respondents who had diploma in early childhood education (n=90, 64%) were more than those who had other educational qualifications (n=39, 28%), and bachelor in early childhood education (n=11, 8%). This result implies that majority (72%) of the kindergarten school teachers in the district studied early childhood education as a programme of study in the college or university. This has positive implications on early childhood education.

The majority (n=86, 61%) of the respondents taught kindergarten two class or pupils, while 54 (39%) taught KG one pupils. With regard to teaching experience, some respondents had taught for 1-3 years (n=117, 84%), 4-6 years (n=11, 8%), and 7-10 years (n=12, 9%). On class size, a moderate number (n=64, 46%) of respondents mentioned a class size of 50 or more pupils. This was followed by a class size of 40-49 pupils (n=52, 37%) and a class size of 30-39 pupils (n=24, 17%).

4.2. Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers on play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality?

The first research question seeks to assess public kindergarten teachers' perceptions about the concept of play as well as its place in teaching and learning. The result is presented in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Perceptions of public kindergarten teachers about play in the Sangnarigu Municipality (n = 140)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD.
1. It is important to have blocks and toys in the classroom	25(18)	115(82)	0(0)	0(0)	3.18	.384
2. Children learn best by playing	11(8)	129(92)	0(0)	0(0)	3.08	.270
3. Play and learning are two separate things	36(26)	78(56)	26(19)	0(0)	3.07	.664
4. Music and song are activities used for play	26(19)	100(71)	0(0)	14(10)	2.98	.767
5. Hands on activities are the best type of learning for pre-schoolers	12(9)	105(75)	23(16)	0(0)	2.92	. 495
6. It is important to make time to play each day	11(8)	75(54)	54(39)	0(0)	2.69	.610
7. It is important to have a dramatic play area in the classroom	14(10)	78(56)	23(16)	25(18)	2.57	.898
8. Outdoor play time is important to children's development	14(10)	55(39)	49(35)	22(16)	2. 44	.874
9. It is important for children to choose their play activities	0(0)	74(53)	52(37)	14(10)	2.43	.669
Overall Mean and SD					**2.55**	**.570**

Key: X - Mean; **SD.** - Standard Deviation; **SA –** Strongly Agree**; A –** Agree; **D-**Disagree**; SD –** Strongly Disagree**. Note:** *The figures in parentheses are in percentage*

Table 4.2 presents responses on the perceptions of public kindergarten teachers about play in the Sangnarigu Municipality. The cut-off mean (X) value and standard deviation (SD) were used as guideline for the interpretation of the levels of respondents' opinions. This was done in order to facilitate the interpretation of the results. In line with the average or cut-off mean (X) value of $X \geq 2.55$ in Table 2, majority of the KG teachers perceived that it is important to have blocks and toys in the classroom (n = 140, 100%; X = 3.18, SD = .384). Teachers' perception was also high with regard to the statement that children learn best by playing (X = 3.08, SD = .270). There was high opinion on the statement that play and learning are two separate things (X = 3.07, SD = .664). Similarly, there was high perception that music and song are activities used for play X = 2.98, SD = .767).

In addition, there was high perception that hands on activities are the best type of learning for pre-schoolers (X = 2.92, SD = .495). Again, there was a high opinion of the KG teachers that it is important for children to make time to play each day (X = 2.69, SD = .610). Also, there was high perception that it is important to have a dramatic play area in the classroom (X = 2.57, SD = .898). However, there was low perception that outdoor play time is important to children's development (X = 2. 44, SD = .874). Similarly, there was low perception that it is important for children to choose their play activities (X = 2. 43, SD = .669).

The evidence gathered from the data in Table 2 indicates that public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality have varied perspectives about play. It emerged from the results that some teachers viewed play as different from learning. In

other words, they viewed play and learning as two separate or dichotomous activities, but others believed children learn through play. This finding implies that it is difficult for the teachers to differentiate between children's play and learning as well as to integrate them in theory and practice. This observation is consistent with that of Johansson et al. (2006) who also found that play and learning are inseparable dimensions of children's experience. The finding is parallel to the views of several researchers (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Broadhead, Wood, & Howard, 2010; Maynard & Waters, 2007; McInnes et al., 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009; Quiñones & Li, 2015; van Oers, 2013; Wong & Logan, 2016) who viewed play and learning as dichotomous concepts which are difficult to define and integrate, either in thinking or in practice.

It emerged from the result that play is educative at the same time recreational and enjoyable activity which supports children's growth and development. The findings revealed its behavioural, psychomotor, and social rewards for children such as development of self-confidence, listening and speaking skills, moral lessons, and memory and recall skills. It also unfolds from the result that play is any pleasurable activity performed by children through manipulation of objects, and interaction with other children without necessarily the interference and control of the teacher. This finding is consistent with the claim by some researchers (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011; Pearce & Bailey, 2011) who observed that children's play is particularly an enjoyable and/or fun activity.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers about Play

The findings above are further buttressed by the qualitative data. The interview responses give credence to the finding that public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality have mixed opinions on play. This is supported by interview data below.

One male teacher expressed:

> *They are activities that children enjoy doing that have behavioural, psychomotor, and social rewards. There are solitary and cooperative plays. Children need play to support their growth and development.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

Another male teacher commented:

> *Play is an activity to be engaged in for the purpose of recreation or entertainment. Play is a very good activity that should be used in all schools. Examples are social play and dramatic play.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

Corresponding quotes from a male teacher are:

> *Play is an act which children engage in it to do away with boredom. It is at the same time educative as they learn. Children learn through play. Their talents are exhibited through play. Timidity is avoided when children play. They engage in natural walk, play ampe, and sing songs*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

One male teacher postulated that:

> *Play is any act performed by children without the control of the teacher. Children learn through play. Dramatization and ampe are types of play.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

A male teacher disclosed that:

> *Play is taking part in an activity. Play helps children to have self-confidence. An example is role play. Play helps pupils to acquire listening and speaking skills.* (Male, KG1 teacher)

Here are quotes from a female teacher:

> *Play is any activity that children enjoy doing through manipulation and interaction. Play helps pupils learn and understand concepts better. For examples of play are role play and dramatic play.* (Female, KG1 teacher)

Also, a female teacher had this to say:

> *Play refers to an act or drama that helps children to comprehend lessons better. It helps children to understand and*

> *recall lessons. It makes lessons real or practical. Examples include drama and role play.* (Female, KG1 teacher)

One female teacher remarked:

> *Play is engaging in any activity for enjoyment, learning, and recreation. Children at this level learn best through play. We have listening games, dramatic play, and locomotors play*. (Female, KG2 teacher)

Another female teacher stated that:

> *Play is any activity you engage pupils for enjoyment and learning. Children acquire moral lessons through play. Examples are football, ampe and ludo, etcetera*. (Female, KG2 teacher)

One female teacher observed that:

> *Play is a set of scenes where people demonstrate an act to get idea from it. Play enables KG children to understand, recollect, and memorise ideas or lessons easily. An example is cooperative play.* (Female, KG2 teacher)

The interview responses substantiate the findings that play and learning is two sides of the same coin. The findings indicate that public kindergarten teachers in Sangnarigu Municipality have diverse perceptions and understanding of children's play. This is because some teachers viewed it as separable concepts, but others thought of play as inseparable from learning because they believed children learn best through play. These findings corroborate the views of several researchers (Bassok & Rorem, 2014; Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Broadhead et al., 2010; Freeman, 2015; Johansson et al., 2006; Lynch, 2015; Maynard & Waters, 2007; McInnes et al., 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009; Quiñones & Li, 2015; van Oers, 2013; Wong & Logan, 2016) who viewed children's play as inseparable from learning.

The interview responses highlighted that play is self-initiated activity by children, without devoid of and/or with limited interference from adults, for the purposes of recreation and fun. The interview data further indicated that play is not only an

enjoyable activity, but educative and supportive of children's learning, growth, and development. This observation is in line with that of Dunphy and Farrell (2011) as well as Pearce and Bailey (2011) who averred that children's play is fun activity.

Research Question 2: In what ways do kindergarten teachers use educational play activities during instruction in the Sangnarigu Municipality?

The second research question seeks to examine the instructional practices of kindergarten teachers in play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality. The result is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Instructional practices of public kindergarten teachers during children's play in the Sangnarigu Municipality (n = 140)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD.
1. I use blocks in my classroom	36(26)	75(54)	29(21)	0(0)	3.05	.681
2. I often make provision for learning through play in the classroom.	28(20)	98(70)	0(0)	14(10)	3.00	.777
3. I use dramatic play in my classroom	28(20)	75(54)	26(19)	11(8)	2.85	.827
4. I use play as an important component and technique of my instructional activities.	26(19)	59(42)	55(39)	0(0)	2.79	.734
5. I use child created games in my classroom.	36(26)	51(36)	39(28)	14(10)	2.77	.945
6 I use play as an instructional modality	0(0)	99(71)	41(29)	0(0)	2.70	.456
7. I engage children in play activities	14(10)	78(56)	34(24)	14(10)	2.65	.793
8. I use music in my classroom	25(18)	40(29)	61(44)	14(10)	2.54	.900
Overall Mean and SD					**2.79**	**.222**

Key: X - Mean; **SD.** - Standard Deviation; **SA –** Strongly Agree**; A –** Agree; **D-** Disagree**; SD –** Strongly Disagree**. Note:** *The figures in parentheses are in percentage*

Table 4.3 presents responses on the instructional practices and roles of public kindergarten teachers during children's play. With the cut-off mean (X) value of 2.79

and standard deviation (SD) of .222, there was a high response on the use of blocks in classrooms by the teachers (X = 3.05, SD = .681).

Similarly, there was a high response on the provision for learning through play in the classroom by the teachers (X=3.00, SD = .777). A high response was also recorded for the use of dramatic play in the classroom by the teachers (X=2.85, SD = .827). Also, a high response was also recorded for the use of play as a component and technique of instructional activities by the teachers (X=2.79, SD = .734). Teachers' response on the use of child created games in the classroom was low (X=2.77, SD = .945).

There was a low response value for the of use play as an instructional modality by the teachers (X=2.70, SD = .456). A low response was also recorded for engagement of children in play activities by the teachers (X=2.65, SD = .793). Also, a low response was recorded for the use music in classrooms by the teachers (X=2.54, SD = .900).

Theme 2: Instructional Practices of Kindergarten Teachers during Children Play in the Sangnarigu Municipality

The findings of the study revealed that learning through play features on the school timetable of public kindergartens in the Sangnarigu Municipality. It also emerged that the teachers played several roles when using play-based teaching as a component and technique of instructional activities. These findings are supported with evidence from the interview responses which are presented below.

One male teacher explained:

> *Yes, there is provision for play on the school time table. Any play. Play activities take place both inside and outside the classroom. Play-based teaching means every activity involving plays that form part of the teaching. I see myself as the facilitator of children play*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

One male teacher interviewee said that:

> *Yes, play features on the timetable. It includes see-saw and games. It occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Play based teaching means involving learners more in lessons.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

Also, a male teacher commented that:

> *Yes, it is on the timetable. They engage in dramatic play both inside and outside the classroom. Play based teaching is a child-led and open-ended play. I act as a facilitator during children's play.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

Another male lamented said that:

> *Yes, it is on the timetable. They include ampe, football, and skipping. It occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Play based teaching means most of the activities are carried out through play. I act as an instructor. I monitor their activities. I also demonstrate and participate in children's play.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

One male teacher noted that:

> *Yes, play features on the school timetable. Children engage in role plays and games. They do so both inside and outside the classroom.* (Male, KG1 teacher)

A female teacher indicated:

> *Yes, play features on the school timetable. I mean any type of play provided it is safe and supervised. It takes place in the classroom and outside the classroom. Play based teaching means every activity that involve play as an integral part of the curriculum. My role is to act as a supervisor and facilitator.* (Female, KG1 teacher)

Another female teacher stated:

> *Certainly, play features on the school timetable. Children engage in ampe and solitary play. Play-based teaching is involving children in lessons through play.I instruct and monitor children during play. Children easily recall lessons. It makes teaching and learning easy.* (Female, KG1 teacher)

One female teacher stated:

> *Yes, there is provision for play on the school timetable. We allow the children to play ampe, football, and stone passing play. Yes, it usually occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Play based teaching sustains children's interest during lesson. It also aids understanding of lessons. I see myself as a playmate to children.* (Female, KG2 teacher)

Another female teacher observed that:

> *There is no particular time for play. There is no particular type of play. Play occurs both in and out of the classroom. Play-based teaching means using play as a methodology. I play various roles. For example, monitoring play activities of children.* (Female, KG2 teacher)

A female teacher expressed:

> *No, play does not feature on the school timetable. Play-based teaching occurs when instructions is based on activities. This means that teaching is activity-centred. In other words, it is activity-oriented teaching. I act as a facilitator and playmate.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

A response from a female teacher indicated:

> *Yes, play features on the school timetable. Children engage in cooperative play. This occurs both inside and outside the classroom. I act as an observer and a mediator whenever children play.* (Female, KG2 teacher)

The interview responses indicate that play-based learning features are on the school timetable, and that teachers acted as facilitators, instructors, supervisors, playmates, mediators, and observers during children's play. The finding that there is provision for play on the school time table, and teachers play many roles during children's play corroborate the views of several researchers (Dockett, 2011; Einarsdóttir, 2005; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; McInnes et al., 2013; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015b; Pyle & Alaca, 2016; Sandberg et al., 2017) who stated that teachers are required to perform several roles when children play and when utilizing play. These researchers averred that teachers should act as planners, providers, scribes, participant, mediators, observers, players, leader, instructional guide, storyteller, informer, assessor and evaluator or examiner.

Research Question 3: What challenges do kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality?

The fourth research question seeks to identify the challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality. The result is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality (n = 140)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD.
1.Negative parental attitudes about play	73(52)	41(29)	12(9)	14(10)	3.42	. 622
2.Difficulty in controlling pupils	64(46)	53(38)	12(9)	11(8)	3.20	.233
3.Difficulty in handling (distributing) materials vis-à-vis large class size of pupils	64(46)	64(46)	12(9)	0(0)	3.18	.725
4.Difficult to fit play into lessons/time table	64(46)	60(43)	16(11)	0(0)	3.17	.722
5.Time constraint	68(49)	60(43)	12(9)	0(0)	3.14	. 884
6.School children always get injured during outdoor play	76(74)	35(25)	18(13)	11(8)	3.09	. 983
7.Absence of school fence makes outdoor play unsafe for children	25(18)	12(9)	58(41)	45(32)	2.56	.991
8.Insufficient teachers to supervise children's outdoor play	25(18)	23(16)	37(26)	55(39)	2.53	.941
9.The scheme of work leaves no time for outdoor play	0(0)	33(24)	57(41)	50(36)	2.38	.801
Overall Mean and SD					**3.16**	**.388**

Key: X - Mean; **SD.** - Standard Deviation; **SA –** Strongly Agree**; A –** Agree; **D –** Disagree**; SD –** Strongly Disagree**.** ***Note:*** *The figures in parentheses are in percentage*

Table 4.5 presents responses on other challenges faced by public kindergartens teachers in implementing children's play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality. With the cut-off mean (X) value of 3.16 and standard deviation (SD) of .388, it was found that negative parental attitudes about play was a problem (X = 3. 42, SD = .622). This was followed by difficulty in controlling pupils during play (X = 3. 20, SD = .233), difficulty in handling (distributing) materials vis-à-vis large class size of pupils (X = 3. 18, SD = .725), and difficulty to fit or integrate play into lessons/time table (X = 3. 17, SD = .722).

Time constraint was not a significant challenge to the teachers (X = 3. 14, SD = .884). Also, school children always getting injured during outdoor play was not serious problem (X = 3. 09, SD = .983). There was no challenge with regard to safety issues such as the absence of school fence that makes outdoor play unsafe for children (X = 2. 56, SD = .991). There was no significant challenge as regards insufficient teachers to supervise children's outdoor play (X = 2. 53, SD = .941). It was also not a challenge that the scheme of work leaves no time for outdoor play (X = 2. 38, SD = .801).

The result in Tables 4.5 revealed infrastructural and material as well as instructional and administrative challenges faced by public teachers in the use of play. These findings corroborate the views of several researchers (Beighle & Morrow, 2014; Sharma et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2011; Webster, Erwin, & Parks, 2013) who also identified the barriers of not having the proper and adequate equipment and materials for play, not having enough space to be active, not enough time in the schedule, and having too many pupils to teach. They explained that these barriers do not offer their pupils the time and opportunity to play.

Theme 4: Challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities in the Sangnarigu Municipality

The interview data yielded same result and buttresses these findings which are reflected in the interview responses.

A male teacher commented that:

> *I faced a lot of difficulties. It is a challenge to supervise a large number of pupils during play. In fact, it is difficult to monitor the play of activities of children due to large class size. Time allocated for play activities is insufficient and the large number of children is problematic*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

Another male teacher said that:

> *It is difficult guiding the children. There is lack of play materials. There are not many teachers to supervise the children during play*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

One male teacher noted that

> *I find it difficult to control the children. There is absence of play materials in the school.* (Male, KG2 teacher)

Another male teacher indicated that

> *Time for play is inadequate. It is difficult to supervise and control children during play because teachers are not many*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

A male teacher also expressed that:

> *There are inadequate play materials. There is lack of money to buy play materials. There is lack of trained early childhood teachers in the school.* (Male, KG1 teacher)

A female interviewee remarked that:

> *Pupils tend to be over excited during play. This makes it difficult to control the class. There is also a challenge of the unavailability or inadequacy of play materials. The duration for play activities too is inadequate. Again, the age of children is a challenge. Some are quite old while others are very little, tiny and tender*. (Female, KG1 teacher)

A female teacher also said:

> *There are inadequate play materials. There are no funds for improvisation. Sometimes, children mishandle the play materials.* (Female, KG1 teacher)

Another female teacher interviewee commented that:

> *There is difficulty in controlling the class because of large class size. Time for play is inadequate and there is absence of play materials.* (Female, KG2 teacher)

A female interviewee also added that:

> *Time and resource constraints make it difficult to use play activities in school. It is difficult to integrate play into teaching activities. It is also time consuming*. (Female, KG2 teacher)

Another female interviewee supported it by saying:

> *Play is time consuming. There are inadequate play materials and other resources. Teachers are not many to supervise play activities of children*. (Male, KG2 teacher)

The interview data echo the lack and inadequacy of play materials. Also, the result indicates that it is a challenge to monitor and supervise pupils during play due to large class size. In other words, it is difficult to guide and control children during play because of the large number of pupils. Large class sizes are also a barrier to the implementation of play0based instruction and learning in schools. A higher teacher-child ratios and less resourced kindergarten classroom environments is a barrier to a play-based programme to emerge in schools. This view was echoed by other researchers (Martlew, Stephen & Ellis, 2011; Stephen, 2010).

It also unfolds from the result that the duration for play activities too short, and that play is time consuming. This finding is congruent with a study by Carlsson-Paige and Levin (2010) who also cited the challenge of reduction or elimination of time for children's play by teachers and the reliance on a scripted curriculum designed to prepare children for formal learning and assessments.

It also emerged from the interview result that most public kindergarten teachers in the district had trouble in controlling pupils during play, handling (distributing) materials vis-à-vis large class size of pupils, integrating play into lessons/time table. These findings are also in tandem with the views of other researchers (Fleer, 2013; Grieshaber

& McArdle, 2010; Moyles, 2010a) who observed that teachers face challenges to the integration of play-based learning and play pedagogy in schools despite the recognition that play offers a lot of benefits to children.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0. Overview

The study investigated the play activities among pre-schoolers at early childhood centres in the Sangnarigu Municipality. To arrive at this objective, one hundred and forty (140) public kindergarten teachers were sampled through a combination of census, and purposive sampling techniques for the study. The concurrent nested mixed method design was adopted for this study. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72) and interview guide. The quantitative data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation which were presented in tables. Qualitative data gathered from the sample was analysed using thematic analysis — responses from respondents were categorized into themes. This chapter highlights the summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study. Suggestions for further studies are also put forward.

5.1. Summary of key findings

Among the findings of this study were the following:

The first research question sought to find out the perceptions of kindergarten teachers on play activities at public kindergartens in the Sangnarigu Municipality. It emerged from the findings that public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality had mixed opinions about play. In other words, there were differences in beliefs,

perspectives, and understanding about children's play. The findings indicate that some teachers viewed play and learning as two separate or dichotomous activities, but others believed children learn through play.

The second research question examined instructional practices of the public kindergarten teachers in play activities. The findings of the study revealed that play features on the school timetable of public kindergartens in the district. The findings also revealed that teachers played several roles when using play-based teaching as an instructional technique and activity. It unfolds that the teachers acted as facilitators, instructors, supervisors, playmates, mediators, and observers during children's play.

The third research question looked at how play materials enhance teaching and learning of kindergarten pupils. The study found out that play contributes to cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of public kindergarten pupils in the Sangnarigu Municipality. Cognitively, the findings established that play makes children learn acquire knowledge about the world around them. Additionally, the findings indicate that play enables children to develop creativity, imagination, decision-making, language, socio-cultural, gross and fine motor skills.

The last objective and research question four of this study identified the challenges kindergarten teachers face when implementing play activities. The findings of this study identified lack and inadequacy of play equipment and materials, not having enough indoor space, not enough time on the schedule, and having too many pupils to teach. Additionally, the study found that it is a challenge for teachers to guide and control, monitor and supervise pupils during play due to large class size.

5.2. Conclusions

The research set out to gather information from 140 public kindergarten teachers in the Sangnarigu Municipality through questions and interviews regarding their perspectives on children's play. The outcomes of this study confirm findings in the literature that play is an integral part of children's learning even though play and learning are perceived as separate activities in theory and practice, thereby making it difficult for teachers to integrate it into teaching and learning.

Though there is endorsement by public kindergarten teachers of the use of the play-based curriculum at kindergartens in the district, the findings of the study do not perhaps auger well for the integration of play into teaching and learning because of the challenges in integrating play into teaching and learning. Apparently, challenges such as large class size, limited and unsuitable space and materials for play, required to implement play-based teaching and learning, are the main reasons the teachers cited as barriers. Notwithstanding the challenges and if play is a necessary component to early childhood education by practitioners and theorists alike, it should continue to take precedence in today's early grade classroom.

To conclude, the present study has fulfilled its stated purpose highlighting how public kindergarten teachers in Sangnarigu Municipality view play, and how they perceive its use within the school context. The study and the results will increase the understanding of teachers' pedagogical thinking regarding play as a learning medium, which is important in order to encourage kindergarten teachers to put more emphasis on understanding theoretical and practical bases for learning and forms of playing.

In addition, the study encourages considering outdoor learning environments as potential contexts for playing and learning, since they increase the potential for diverse

play types and are significant for kindergarten pupils. The role played by the teacher in providing opportunities for children's outdoor play is very crucial. This is because a preschool could have plenty of space and equipment but if the teachers rarely bring children outside for active play, they would not enjoy the benefits of outdoor play. Again, it is because natural settings offer a diversity of environmental stimuli that contributes to increased use of senses, increased health benefits, interactive physical activity, and experimentation with social situations that prepare children for future life experiences

This study is limited because the sample consisted only of teachers who participated in it; its. findings regarding teachers' perspectives, therefore, cannot be generalized to the whole population of Ghanaian kindergarten teachers.

5.3 Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Based on the first research question, the study recommends that the Sangnarigu Municipality Directorate of Education should organise periodic workshops for kindergarten teachers on the importance of play. In addition, heads of basic schools in the district should create awareness during Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings by sensitising parents and teachers about the importance of play importance to children's growth and development as well as learning.
2. With regard to the second research question, the study recommends that the Sangnarigu Municipality Directorate of Education should organise periodic workshops for kindergarten teachers on their roles in the implementation and

practice of play-based teaching in the early childhood curriculum. However, children's play belongs to children; teachers should not destroy children's own places for play through insensitive planning, or by creating places and programmes that segregate children and control their play.

3. Finally, with respect to fourth research question, the study recommends that the Sangnarigu Municipal Directorate of Education in liaison with the Sangnarigu Municipal Assembly and Non-Governmental Organisations in the district should provide adequate play materials and equipment to all public kindergartens in the district. Also, head teachers of basic schools in the district should identify other sources of funding with a view to assisting in purchasing teaching play materials and equipment for their schools. They should lobbying with local and international organisations to donate play materials and equipment to schools. In addition, the study recommends that Sangnarigu Municipal Assembly should recruit and employ teaching assistants (attendants) who will help kindergarten teachers in handling and taking care of children during play.

5.4. Suggestion for further studies

This study provided a snapshot of the perspectives of public kindergarten teachers on play activities. Future studies should involve parents and their views with respect to the role of play and its place in learning and children's development. Parents' perception of play and schooling serve to constrain the nature of play-based instruction in schools.

A mixed-method sequential exploratory design could be used to replicate this study to cover a larger sample in order to draw a conclusive evidence on the subject matter or otherwise. This would help strengthen the foundation for interpreting and generalising the empirical results on the subject matter.

The current study is limited in scope because it was based on samples from only public kindergartens in Sangnarigu Municipality. To make the study more representative and the results generalizable for the whole country, there is the need to replicate this study among population groups from both private and public kindergartens using larger geographic areas.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Introduction

This questionnaire is designed to examine the perceptions of early childhood educators on play in kindergarten schools. The information is being sought for, through this medium is for research purpose only. You are kindly requested to read through the items and respond to them as honest and objective as possible. Every information provided shall be treated as confidential and private. Besides, your anonymity is assured.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DATA

Please tick as applicable (√)

1. Sex: Female [ ] Male [ ]
2. What is your highest level of education?
   MPhil in Early Childhood Education [ ]
   B.Ed in Early Childhood Education [ ]

Diploma in Early Childhood Education [ ]

Certificate in Early Childhood Education [ ]

Other [ ] **specify:** ……

3. What kindergarten class/level do you teach? KG 1 [ ] KG 2 [ ]

4. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?

1-3 yrs [ ] 4-6 yrs [ ] 7-10 yrs [ ] 11-15 yrs [ ] 16-20 [ ]

5. How many pupils do you have in your class?

Below 20 [ ] 20-29 [ ] 30-39 [ ] 40-59 [ ] 50 and above [ ]

SECTION B: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY ACTIVITIES

Instruction: *Please tick* [√] ***only one*** *option to indicate your level of agreement with* ***each item***

SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NAD=Neither agree nor disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

6. Play and learning are two separate things.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

7. Hands on activities are the best type of learning for preschoolers.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

8. It is important to make time to play each day.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

9. In my opinion, children learn best by playing.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

10. It is important for children to choose their play activities.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

11. It is important to have blocks and toys in the classroom.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

12. It is important to have a dramatic play area in the classroom.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

13. Outdoor play time is important to children's development.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

14. Music and song are activities used only for play.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

SECTION C: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF TEACHER IN PLAY ACTIVITIES

15. I use play as an important component and technique of my instructional activities.

Always [ ] Seldom [ ] Rarely [ ] Never [ ]

16. I often make provision for learning through play in your classroom?

Always [ ] Seldom [ ] Rarely [ ] Never [ ]

17. I engage children in types of play such as:

Physical or outdoor play [ ] Creating [ ] Games and puzzles [ ] Building [ ]

Pretending or imagining [ ] Playing with toys [ ] Technology or media [ ]

Dancing or singing [ ] Ludo [ ] Ampe [ ]

18. I use play as an instructional modality.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

19. I use dramatic play in my classroom.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

20. I use music in my classroom.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

21. I use child created games in my classroom.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

22. I use blocks in my classroom.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

SECTION D: THE ROLE OF PLAY ACTIVITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUPILS

23. Preschoolers learn many things while playing on the playground.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

24. Play leads to cognitive development.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

25. Preschoolers play in order to acquire knowledge.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

26. Outdoor play promotes decision-making skills.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

27. Play is creativity and imagination.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

28. The purpose of play is to promote social skills.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

29. Children feel more independent during outdoor play.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

30. Children interact more when they are outdoors than indoors.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

31. Children develop self-confidence and independence during play.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

32. Play promotes physical and emotional health of children.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

33. Play is how children learn about the world around them.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

34. Outdoor play improves children's mood.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

SECTION E: CHALLENGES KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS FACE WHEN IMPLEMENTING PLAY ACTIVITIES

Instruction: *Please tick* [√] ***only one*** *option to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each item on* ***other challenges.***

SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NAD=Neither agree nor disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

45. Negative parental attitudes about play:

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

46. The school children always get injured during outdoor play.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

47. The scheme of work leaves no time for outdoor play.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

48. The absence of school fence makes outdoor play unsafe for children.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

49. My school has insufficient teachers to supervise children's outdoor play.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

50. There is time constraint.
SD [ ] D [ ]NAD [ ]A [ ] SA [ ]

51. There is difficulty in handling (distributing) materials vis-à-vis large class size of pupils.

SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

52. There is difficulty in controlling pupils.
SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

53. It is difficult to fit play into lessons/time table. SD [ ] D [ ] NAD [ ] A [ ] SA [ ]

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Introduction

This interview guide is designed to seek your perceptions on play in kindergarten schools. The information is being sought for, through this medium for research purpose only. You are kindly requested to read through the items and respond to them as honest and objective as possible. Every information provided shall be treated as confidential and private. Besides, your anonymity is assured.

1. Perceptions of play activities

a. In your opinion, how could you describe play activities?
b. Tell me about the types of play you provide in your classroom and why.

2. Instructional practices in play activities

a. Is there any provision for play in the school timetable?
b. What types of play do you allow as per school regulations, in the classrooms, around the school?
c. Where does play usually occur, inside, outside of the class or both?

d. What does play based teaching mean to you?

e. How do you see your role in play?

3. Role of play in children's learning and development

a. How important do you feel play is in a kindergarten curriculum?

b. Does play have positive benefits for children?

c. How do you think children learn through play?

4. Challenges in implementing play activities

a. What difficulties do you encounter in using play activities at school?

b. What factors make it challenging to integrate play into teaching?

Thank you!