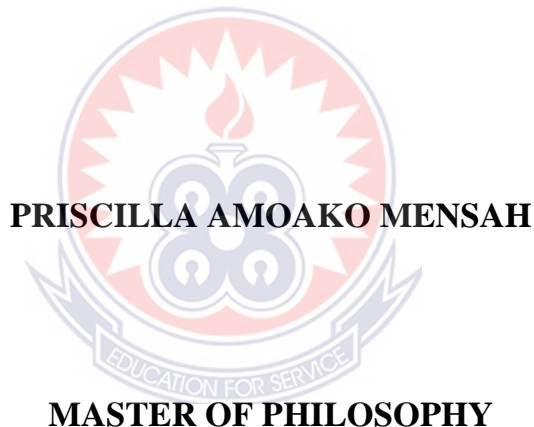


UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY AT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN
YILO-KROBO MUNICIPALITY**



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MUNICIPALITY**



**A dissertation in the Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of
Applied Behavioural Science in Education, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Early Childhood Education)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Priscilla Amoako Mensah hereby declare that this thesis with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original research and has not been submitted, either in parts or in whole for another degree in this University or 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/dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: Prof. Michael Subbey PhD.

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

To my mentor and friend, I couldn't have done this without you.

Thank you for all of your support along the way.



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My first and foremost gratitude goes to the God almighty for the life and strength given me to pursue this course. My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Prof. Michael Subbey without whose effort and help this project work would not have been a success.

I also express my appreciation to all the lecturers of the Department of Early Childhood Education for their help in diverse ways. Special thanks to my family and friends who in numerous ways have been of help to my education and personal life.

To everyone who finds this work useful, I am grateful.

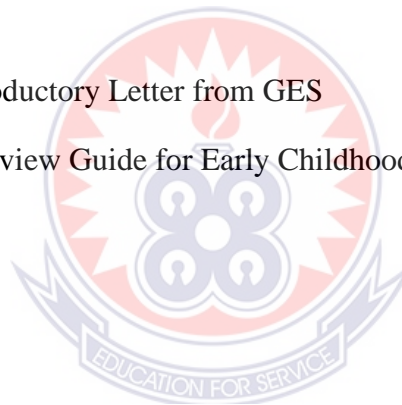


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ACRONYMS

DAP Developmental Appropriate Practice

ECE Early Childhood Education

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS Early
Childhood Education Centre

PBP Play-Based Pedagogy

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development





ABSTRACT

The study explored the challenges teachers' face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The study employed qualitative research approach with the interpretivist paradigm. The case study design was adopted for the study. Using the purposive and convenient sampling procedure, 13 early childhood educators were involved in the study. An interview guide was used to gather requisite data for the study. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically in accordance with the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that most teachers hold positive views about play-based pedagogy while others hold negative views about it as being too demanding and time consuming. Also, there are limited teaching and learning resources available for teachers to ensure a successful implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.. The study recommended that, the education directorate should engage in advocacy efforts and awareness campaigns within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. These initiatives should target parents, caregivers, and the community to promote understanding and acceptance of play-based approaches. Also, the educational authorities in the region should prioritize resource allocation for early childhood centers. Resources and support systems should be put in place to assist teachers in the implementation of play-based pedagogy.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter includes an introduction to the research study. It contains the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the research, delimitations of the study and organization of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Early childhood can be described as the period from birth to eight years old (Campbell, 1990), and its' a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. The early years of every child is a crucial stage that all caregivers should give much attention to. This stage is important not only because it lays the basis for human development but also because the experiences children are exposed to during this period have lasting influence on childhood. Successful early childhood care and stimulation programmes lays the foundation for creativity, imaginations, self-reliance and survival of the child (Asenso-Boakye, 2005). During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school (Moloney, 2010). Early childhood and care education provides environment that fosters learners' development taking into account all the concern domains of development. Early Childhood Education provides a nurturing atmosphere which nourishes young imaginations and instils self-confidence in the children. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Globally, play based learning has been identified as one of the developmentally appropriate pedagogy to be used in facilitating youngster learning (NAEYC, 2006). This implies that children learn best when they play. Play-based learning has been identified as a developmentally appropriate practice incorporating elements of child-centered learning, open-ended inquiry and hands-on-experiences (Moore et-al, 2014). Play-based pedagogy is an instructional tool for early childhood education which is used in stimulating various areas of children's development and learning (Danniels, 2018). The promotion of playing is still the central element of early childhood education. Play-based learning provides the opportunities for children to develop a sense of the world around them through inquiry, exploration, interaction as well as problem solving. Play is an effective and important educational and instructional tool that educators and caregivers use to teach children and communicate. Play is often considered to be a child-led practice that is separate from learning, whereas learning is a result of teacher-led practices that are perceived to be of higher priority in a classroom setting (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Wood, 2010).

Children are highly motivated to learn, but not in a formal instructional way, play can be regarded as a powerful vehicle for learning (Hauser 2005). Play and playfulness are at the core of early childhood education (Singer 2013), although educators are not always aware of their role in fostering play (Bodrova 2008; Vu, Han, & Buell 2015). This implies that, play and the act of playing are mostly used and encouraged in early childhood education. However, educators end up not knowing their roles in facilitating this play activity. The role of the teacher in a playful learning, according to Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2013), stated that play-based teaching is to provide support for children's learning during play instead of following a more instructive approach of direct teaching. For most people, learning involves acquiring a specific

new skill, such as memorizing alphabets, counting, writing, etc. They often believe that playing is only for fun and involves no actual learning. However, according to studies (such as Hauser 2005; Vygotsky 1966; Danniels 2018), playing is learning. Children learn through play experiences.

Also, recent studies (Einarsdottir, 2014; Fler, 2013) have shown that early childhood teachers' understanding and views of the relation between play and learning impact greatly on their pedagogical decisions and practices such as classroom arrangement, provision of support (material and human wise) to children, instructional delivery, and their level of involvement in children's play.

In Ghana, the 2006 Kindergarten curriculum which focuses on six learning areas (language and literacy, music, and dance and drama, environmental studies, numeracy, and creative activities) recommends facilitation of children's learning through play-based pedagogy and also the 2019 New KG Curriculum recommends facilitation of children's learning through play-based pedagogy

However, to successfully implement this play-based curriculum in the classroom, it is essential to have teachers who possess the requisite content knowledge and pedagogical skills and are confident of their ability to guide and facilitate meaningful learning through play-based pedagogy in a familiar context. The importance of play in early childhood education cannot be underestimated because learning through play is essential to a child's growth. The needs at this level are significant, whereas learning materials are in short supply: almost half of all kindergarten teachers have never received any formal training (Ministry of Education MoE, Ghana 2013 cited in Sabre Charitable Trust country report November 21, 2017).

Agbenyega and Kilbthong (2011), and some commissioned reports (Associate for change, 2016; Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, 2012) indicate that kindergarten teachers are ill prepared to implement the recommended play-based pedagogy successfully. (Associate for change, 2016; Sofo, Thompson & Kanton, 2015; Tamanja, 2016) identify some of the reasons for unreadiness which are inadequate content coverage of play-based pedagogy at pre-service level and the absence of continuing in-service professional development programs to address some of the knowledge and skills-related challenges. According to a study by Darkwa and Lartey (2018), the quality of ECE services in the Municipality is poor, with inadequate facilities and resources, low teacher qualifications, and limited access to training and professional development opportunities.

Play based pedagogy has a lot of benefits to pupils' learning hence any hindrance or barrier to its usage by early childhood teachers calls for attention. It is against this background the researcher seeks to provide the basis for exploring into challenges teachers face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Every teacher in early childhood education center should effectively use play-based teaching strategies in their classrooms since they are trained from the universities and colleges of education. However, teachers in early childhood education centers in Yilo-krobo Municipality face challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy.

The government and related agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service, provide pre-service and in-service training and support to these teachers to enhance their teaching practices. The Government of Ghana in

collaboration with some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) like SABRE Education, Right to Play foundation, PLC and so on have helped to improve teachers pedagogical practice regarding the use of play-based as an instructional strategy in all early childhood centers in Ghana of which early childhood centers in Yilo-krobo Municipality is no exceptional. According to a study by Darkwa and Larrey (2018), the quality of ECE services in the Municipality is poor, with inadequate facilities and resources, low teacher qualifications, and limited access to training and professional development opportunities.

Despite these efforts, the early childhood teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality are still facing difficulties in incorporating play-based pedagogy into their teaching methods.

A casual interaction with some teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality indicate that, they have different views on the use of play as a teaching pedagogy, issues with material resources, training issues pertaining to workshops organized, and issues regarding the type of strategies to use in play-based pedagogy when teaching these children. Kindergarten teachers are ill prepared to implement the recommended play-based pedagogy successfully. (Associate for change, 2016). Fler & Raban (2012), mentioned that some educators may lack the training and support they need to effectively implement play-based pedagogy.

There is the need for further support and resources to overcome these challenges and ensure that early childhood education in Yilo-Krobo Municipality is effective and of high quality. Today in Ghana, to succeed one must be well-trained in academics and ready to join the work force.

However, Pink (2006), states, “people have to be able to do something that's hard to automate and that delivers on the growing demand for nonmaterial things like stories and design. Typically, these are things we associate with the right side of the brain, with artistic and empathetic and playful sorts of abilities” (p. 123).

Society wants children to perform well on academics and standardized tests. The belief that didactic, teacher-centered instruction and worksheets are effective strategies to promote successful performance on standardized tests has resulted in the exodus of play from not only the classroom but from the school entirely (Miller & Almon, 2009). Yet, this neglects the development of the right side of the brain, which is important for performing tasks that require creativity, empathy and behavioral flexibility. Ghana is now a nation that is driven by assessments, not creativity and this has affected early childhood educators' view on using play as a teaching method.

A study by Lyabwene (2010) in Tanzania indicated that issues of pre-primary school teachers' professional qualifications affected the quality of classroom interaction, hence, impacting on teaching and learning approaches significantly. The complaints are raised by different ECE stakeholders on the unaddressed pedagogical challenges, especially teachers' tendency of using compulsive, direct and unfriendly teacher-centered teaching strategies (United Republic of Tanzania URT, 2008).

The case of Ghana is similar to that of Tanzania based on several reports from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including Sabre Charitable Trust, US Agency for International Development (USAID), The Right to Play and many others. In spite of the government of Ghana's strong policy commitment to the kindergarten sector, it continues to face challenges of access and quality. The needs at this level are

significant, whereas learning materials are in short supply: almost half of all kindergarten teachers have never received any formal training (Ministry of Education MoE, Ghana 2013 cited in Sabre Charitable Trust country report November 21, 2017). Also, another NGO called “The Right to Play” reports that early childhood educators still face curricula and pedagogical challenges and there is a discrepancy between the emphasis and the teaching methods at the kindergartens (Right to Play Ghana, 2016).

Although literature exist to validate the use of play-based as a teaching pedagogy (Eshun, 2014; Ampiah, 2008; Yenpad, 2021; etc). There is the need to have a more effective and efficient means through which pre-school learners can be taught and studied inside and outside the classroom with the inculcation of play in teaching and learning at this level (Bidwell, Watine & Perry, 2014). While studies on impact of play on the development of early childhood education and the challenges head teachers and teachers face with regard to play are less available, most of these have been conducted in Europe and North America and elsewhere (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018; Miller & Almon, 2009; Bhroin, 2017; Bodrova & Leong, 2014; Smith, 2015).

Pyle and Danniels (2017), conducted a study on “the role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of Hijacking play” they discovered that there was a lack of play in the classroom and the need to support academic learning using developmentally appropriate practices due to the increasing acknowledgement in curricula and policies of the challenges. Their study looked at what play-based was about, its relevance and the role of teachers in play but it lacked the ingredient of the challenges teachers face while implementing this play-pedagogy in their classroom.

Another studies conducted by Bsubikova-Mona, Hjetland and Wollscheld (2019), regarding “ECE teachers views on play-based learning: a systematic review” revealed that teachers have different views concerning play and learning, the teachers also express uncertainties as to how and when to get involved. Lastly the practitioners reported on the challenges of Play-Based Learning (PBL), more importantly, policy and curricular delivery pressure. From their study, the identified gap is that the study did not focus on the challenges these practitioners face whiles implementing PBL. Yenpad (2021), conducted a study on exploring kindergarten teachers’ perspectives on the ‘play based learning’ approach to teaching Early Childhood classrooms. This study employed a qualitative research design with the use of a descriptive survey. The study did not looked at the challenges teachers’ face in Early Childhood centers while implementing play-based pedagogy.

Play contributes to children’s learning and development in their holistic development which involves the cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains (Kejo, 2017). Due to this, play based learning has been recommended for children learning in Ghana.

Despite the potential presented by play-based learning, the implementation of this play-based pedagogy seems to be faced with some challenges. Most of the early childhood educators in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality also seem not to have full control over play activities. What is common is that, young children are most often allowed to go out for free play with little or no guidance or supervision. There are some early childhood educators who believe that play as a teaching method is not effective. Some thinks otherwise (Eberle, 2011).

Upon several interactions with some teachers in the Municipality, cross checks at the Ghana Education Service with the ECE coordinator of Yilo-Krobo Municipality as well as other internet search the researcher did, all indicate that not much information is available on the challenges teachers face in implementing the play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the challenges teachers encounter in implementing play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the challenges teachers face in implementing play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality of Eastern Region.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the researcher seeks to find out:

1. Views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
2. Material resources available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
3. How trained teachers are regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
4. Strategies available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?
2. What material resources are available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?
3. How trained are teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?
4. What strategies are available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study findings will benefit kindergarten teachers and improve the way kindergarten teachers employ the activities in their teaching.

Additionally, this study will benefit early childhood educators at policy makers, and theory to uncover their own perception about play-based pedagogy, use appropriate play teaching-learning resource, organize and attend more professional in-service training for teachers in order to acquire more strategies in their teaching. Also, the study will help shed light on the state of affairs regarding the use of play as a pedagogical approach to teaching in kindergarten in the Yilo-krobo Municipality.

More so, the findings will re-awaken the awareness of kindergarten teachers on the role of play in holistic development of children. Finally, the study will serve as a bedrock upon which future studies can be conducted.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The study was delimited to kindergarten teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Again, the study employed qualitative approach with case study design. Kindergarten teachers in the Yilo-krobo Municipality were the only teachers involved in the study.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

1. **Play-based pedagogy:** Is an educational approach or method of teaching that emphasizes the use of play as a tool for learning.
2. **Early Childhood Education:** Refers to the educational experiences and programs that children receive from birth to age 8.
3. **Play:** Is an activity that is engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, typically involving an element of imagination.
4. **Implementation:** Refers to the process of putting a plan, policy, or program into action in order to achieve its intended objectives. In other words, implementation involves carrying out the steps required to turn a concept or idea into a functioning reality.
5. **Kindergarten:** A programme or class of four to six-year-old children that serves as an introduction to formal education.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study was developed and put into five major chapters with specific subheadings. The first chapter dwells on the introduction of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study, delimitations, operational definition of terms and the organization of the study. The second chapter is devoted to review of related literature. this was done using strands derived from the main research questions and put under two main themes

namely the theoretical, conceptual and empirical framework. Chapter three looked at the methodology. This included the research design, population, sample and sampling technique, instrumentation, pre-testing of instruments, reliability and validity of the instruments, procedure for data collection and procedure for analyzing of data were outlined. The four chapter takes a critical look at the analysis and discussion of data using qualitative and quantitative techniques whiles a summary of findings, conclusions, suggestions and recommendations were provided in the fifth chapter.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

A literature review describes the systematic processes of searching for scholarly works (Ridley, 2012), critical review of scholarly works (Hart, 2018), and discussion of published information (Hart, 2018). Typically, a literature review has an operational structure incorporating description and thesis synthesis. The literature review essentially explains the whole process of the analysis, including acting as a guide for analyzing research data and explaining research findings (Hart, 2018). Data pieces for this review were gathered from journals, abstracts, internet, books, and works on parental involvement in education. In this chapter, therefore, previous research works are critically reviewed, analyzed and synthesized to provide a broader context of knowledge sharing. There still exists the need to gather literature in a comprehensive format to make clear the various theories and philosophies that underpin play in early childhood development.

The literature is reviewed under the following sub-headings:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. Concept of early childhood education
3. Play-Based Pedagogy
4. Views of teachers about play-based pedagogy
5. Material or resources availability for play-based pedagogical practices
6. Teachers' training level regarding play-based pedagogical practices
7. Strategies of improving play-based pedagogical practices

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was Socio-cultural theory of Play by Lev Vygotsky (1978). In quantitative studies, one uses theory deductively and places it toward the beginning of the plan for a study. A theory is defined as a set of interrelated concepts, assumptions and generalizations that systematically describes and explains behaviour (Ndurumo, 2007). Therefore, a theory attempts to fit relevant facts into a logical explanation and also serves as a framework for collecting more information. Philosophers of science have argued that one of the most important functions of theoretical framework is that it guides observation. In other words, observation statements cannot be made without using the language of some theory, and in turn, these theories determine what is investigated. Thus, the framework plays an important role by guiding the kinds of questions that we can ask, the nature of evidence that is to be collected, the methodologies that are appropriate for collecting this evidence, the strategies available for analyzing the data and finally, interpretations that we make from this analysis.

Socio-cultural theory of Play (Lev Vygotsky, 1978)

The theoretical framework stems from the socio-cultural theory which was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). This theory considers social, cultural, and historical factors that may influence cognitive development during social interactions. Lev Vygotsky (1978), Piaget's Russian contemporary, was interested in how children learn and how learning contributes to development. One contribution he made to the field was his articulation and demonstration on how a child's development rests on their engagement with their culture. His theory was based on two main concepts that can improve children learning are the Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) and

Scaffolding method. In his theory, he highlighted the concept of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which is the difference between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance or assistance. Scaffolding refers to the supportive structures provided by more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers or peers, to help a child accomplish tasks or solve problems beyond their current level of competence within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Scaffolding can be done in the following ways:|

1. Educators or more skilled peers actively participate in children's play activities, providing guidance, modeling behaviors, and asking thought-provoking questions. For instance, in pretend play scenarios, an adult might join in, guiding children's role-playing or suggesting new ideas, expanding the complexity of the play.
2. Scaffolding in play-based pedagogy involves prompting children to think critically and solve problems independently or collaboratively during play. This might involve asking open-ended questions that encourage exploration and experimentation.
3. Scaffolding is specifically aimed at tasks or concepts within a child's ZPD—the gap between what children can do independently and what they can do with assistance. Through play, educators identify this zone and provide appropriate support to help children advance their skills and understanding. For example, in a block-building activity, a teacher might initially show children how to build a stable structure. As children engage in play, the teacher might observe and offer suggestions to enhance stability or encourage the use of different shapes or sizes, providing just enough support to push the children's skills further without taking over the activity entirely.

In essence, play-based pedagogy utilizes scaffolding by fostering an environment where educators guide, support, and extend children's learning within their ZPD during playful interactions, ultimately enhancing their cognitive and social development.

In his seminal work, Vygotsky emphasized the idea that play is not just a pastime but a zone where children internalize social rules, cultural norms, and cognitive skills through interaction with others. He stated, "In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1978). This concept elucidates how play allows children to extend their capabilities beyond their current developmental stage by engaging in activities that challenge and scaffold their learning.

Vygotsky's theory underlines the importance of social interaction during play. He proposed that children learn best when they interact with more skilled individuals or peers, often termed as the "scaffolding" process. For instance, in pretend play scenarios, children often take on roles and behaviors they have observed from adults or peers, incorporating these social interactions into their play activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory has relevance in understanding how play-based pedagogy can be instrumental in children's learning. By creating environments that encourage social interaction, peer collaboration, and adult guidance, educators can facilitate learning within the ZPD, promoting cognitive and social development (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

Vygotsky saw play as a way to construct knowledge during social interactions with the world and as a source of cognitive development. He believed that parents and teachers can assist children's learning by working within their zone of proximal

development. In the zone of proximal development, children exhibit higher levels of competence than when outside the zone.

To attain self-regulation, individual learners need to expand their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). As Smidt (2009) notes, the ZPD is one of Vygotsky's central contributions to learning and teaching that arises from his focus on the significance of cultural tools and social learning.

Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).

Vygotsky saw play as having two major purposes. One has to do with the role of pretend or fantasy. He believed that the child creates his or her own reality through fantasy or pretend play. An example would be that the child wants to drive a car but is kept from doing so. Therefore, he or she pretends to drive a car. This behavior is important to note as it prompts the child to engage in abstract thought. When the child pretends a branch is a horse, he engages in abstract thought. Vygotsky believed that through symbolic play children come to organize meaning in language and thought.

The second purpose Vygotsky found in play was that it originates from the first purpose and involves rules. Children will engage in play with specific behaviors they think are important to the role they are working through. Often the child will not allow anyone else into this world of pretend unless he or she fits the role. The adult needs to enter the world of play to support or scaffold what the child is attempting to

understand. Vygotsky contributed to the field of play studies his demonstration of how children's development rests on their active participation in their culture.

In sum, this theory is relevant to the study because through play, educators can identify the zone that learners are lacking and provide the appropriate support to help children advance their skills and understanding. Learners can be allowed to learn through play, where they will learn their culture, and other relevant social skills.

2.2 Concept of Early Childhood Education

In the United States, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed guidelines for early childhood education programs that emphasize the importance of play-based pedagogy. The guidelines recognize play as an essential component of early childhood education and encourage educators to use play-based pedagogy to promote children's development and learning (NAEYC, 2021).

Similarly, in Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) emphasizes the importance of play-based pedagogy in promoting children's development and learning. The EYLF recognizes that play provides children with opportunities to explore, experiment, and problem-solve, and encourages educators to use play-based pedagogy to support children's learning across all areas of development (Department of Education and Training, 2017). In addition to policy and curriculum guidelines, research has shown that the implementation of play-based pedagogy can be supported by leadership and professional development. A study by Rethinam and Nair (2019) found that leadership support and professional development were important factors in promoting the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy in Malaysian early childhood education programs.

However, despite the recognition of the importance of play-based pedagogy in policy and curriculum guidelines, some educators may face challenges in implementing this approach due to external factors such as curriculum requirements and pressure to meet academic standards (Tsao & Fetters, 2018). In addition, some educators may lack the training and support they need to effectively implement play-based pedagogy (Fleer & Raban, 2012).

Early childhood education refers to the period of educational development from birth to age eight. It is an essential phase of learning that lays the foundation for a child's future academic, social, and emotional growth (McMullen & Alat, 2002). This period is crucial in shaping children's cognitive and social development as it is during this time that the brain is most receptive to learning and developing skills (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2017). Early childhood education programs typically focus on creating a nurturing and stimulating environment that promotes children's curiosity, creativity, and love for learning. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Epstein (2007), mentioned the age range spans from birth to age eight (thus from Nursery to Basic three) (Groark et al., 2008). In support, UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006) acknowledges that children who benefited from ECE are between the ages from birth to eight (8) years old. It is a time of remarkable brain development that lays the very foundation for subsequent learning in the development of human life. According to the Global Monetary Report (2007), ECE includes nursery, kindergarten and the first three years of primary education. Other frequently used terms include pre-school, early years, kindergarten, playgroup, nursery, pre-grade one, preparatory year, 'zero year' etc. (International Bureau of Education, 2006).

According to the Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (RBEDA), early childhood education refers to a holistic and integrated approach to health, nutrition, protection, and education needs and services (Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, 2010). The Working Group on Early Childhood Development which brings all the key stakeholders including international partners, governments, NGOs, experts and academics officially term early childhood education as Early Childhood Development (ECD).

In Australia, Early Childhood Education and Care (EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS) services for children below school age are usually referred to as either childcare, children's services or early childhood services. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS therefore includes the range of formal care and education services for children under school age and in the early years of school. According to the World Bank (2001), early child development includes services designed for the physical and intellectual growth of children in their early years (ages 0-6). These services incorporate day care, pre-school, home visits by trained professionals, health and nutrition services, and parental education. Bowman (2000) states that:

“Early childhood education does not refer to a single entity; rather, the term covers a variety of programmes for young children between birth and age 8. These programmes take place in children's own homes and in public schools, private pre-schools, and child-care homes and centers. Each of these settings may have quite different characteristics (adult/child ratios, group sizes, age ranges, cultural practices, and adult training and teaching styles) that in turn affect what and how children learn.” (page 12)

Based on the statement above, it can be argued that, Early Childhood Education is seen as the kind of education which is geared towards total development of young children regardless of their location and socio economic background. However, the above can be achieved if professionals who handle these children use varied teaching strategies with emphasis on play to impart knowledge to the child.

The UNESCO (2007) indicates that the majority of children in early childhood education are between the ages of three and six years. In Ghana, pre-school education refers to the type of education given to children from ages Zero (0) to five (5) years, after which they enroll in the formal primary school (Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana, 2002)

2.3 Importance of Early Childhood Education

1. **Cognitive Development:** Early childhood education provides children with opportunities to develop their cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and memory retention. Early childhood education plays a crucial role in cognitive development, which refers to a child's ability to learn, reason, and understand the world around them. High-quality early childhood education programs provide children with a variety of experiences that help them develop their cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and memory retention. For example, children may be exposed to hands-on activities, puzzles, and games that encourage them to think critically and creatively. According to a study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research, children who attend high-quality preschool programs perform better on standardized tests in reading and math in later years than those who don't attend such programs

(Barnett, 2013). This indicates that early childhood education programs can provide children with the foundational skills needed for academic success.

2. **Socialization:** Early childhood education programs also provide opportunities for children to develop their social skills and interact with others. Children who attend early childhood education programs learn how to interact with their peers and adults, and develop social skills such as sharing, cooperating, and communicating effectively. This helps children build strong relationships with others and fosters a sense of community (Lally, Mangione & Honig, 2006).
3. **Emotional Development:** Early childhood education provides children with a nurturing and supportive environment that helps them develop emotional skills such as self-regulation, empathy, and resilience. These skills are critical for future success in school and in life (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007). For example, self-regulation skills allow children to manage their emotions and behaviors, which can lead to better academic outcomes. Research has also shown that children who attended high-quality early childhood education programs demonstrated better emotional regulation skills in kindergarten than those who did not attend such programs (Diamond et al., 2007).
4. Early childhood education programs also promote healthy habits such as good nutrition, physical activity, and proper hygiene. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs are less likely to experience chronic health problems, including obesity and heart disease (Morrow, 2014). This is because these programs provide children with access to healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity, and education on proper hygiene practices.

5. **Parental Involvement:** Early childhood education programs offer opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's learning, which can strengthen the parent-child relationship and enhance academic outcomes (Kagan & Lowenstein, 2004). For example, parents may attend parent-teacher conferences, participate in school events, or volunteer in the classroom. This involvement helps parents understand their child's learning and development, and allows them to support their child's academic success.

In conclusion, early childhood education is essential for a child's overall development and success. It provides children with a strong foundation for future academic, social, and emotional growth. Additionally, early childhood education programs offer a range of benefits that extend to families, communities, and society as a whole. Through early childhood education, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

2.4 Play-Based Pedagogy

Play-based pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes the importance of play in promoting children's development. Play-based pedagogy is grounded in the understanding that children learn best through play and that play is a natural and fundamental aspect of childhood. This research literature aims to explore the benefits of play-based pedagogy and its effectiveness in promoting children's development.

The perspective of children's play was initially considered in education as a yardstick for development of pedagogy (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010). There has been lots of research and findings produced over the years relating to the definition of play. Several researchers and theorists define play differently, however,

many different perspective views on what play is overlapped with other views. Play can be viewed, conceptualized, and defined from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives.

Nowak, Nichols, and Coutts (2009) defined play as, “an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed and episodic” (p. 86). Play as pleasurable and an activity, is seen as a situation by which children learn and interact with the environment and the world around them. Gordon (2009) also argues that “play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected and making transformation possible.” (p. 8). Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences. The voluntary movement of children which includes exploration, playing and learning according to their interests, offer them the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and level of maturation. Play as an important vehicle for children’s all-round development, as well as a reflection of their development is one of the key principles informing Developmental Appropriate Practice (Nutbrown, 2006).

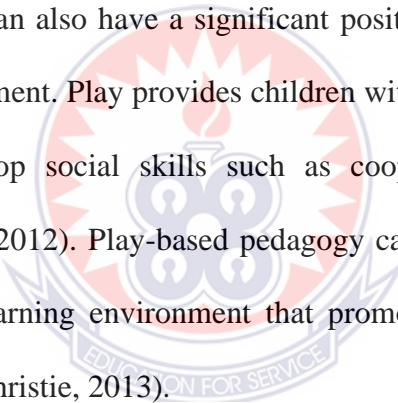
Play-based pedagogy emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment that is supportive, engaging, and responsive to children's needs (Stacey & Sumsion, 2016). The following in-text citations provide further insights into the concept of play-based pedagogy.

According to Stacey and Sumsion (2016), play-based pedagogy recognizes that children's play is a natural and essential aspect of their development. Play-based pedagogy provides children with opportunities to engage in activities that are meaningful and relevant to their lives. This approach emphasizes the importance of

creating a learning environment that is responsive to children's interests, strengths, and needs.

Research has shown that play-based pedagogy can have a significant positive impact on children's cognitive development. Play provides children with opportunities to explore, discover, and experiment, which promotes cognitive development (Pellegrini, 2009). Play-based pedagogy can promote problem-solving skills, spatial reasoning, and creativity (Roskos & Christie, 2013). In addition, play-based pedagogy can help children develop a positive attitude towards learning and can provide a foundation for future academic success (Stacey & Sumsion, 2016).

Play-based pedagogy can also have a significant positive impact on children's social and emotional development. Play provides children with opportunities to interact with their peers and develop social skills such as cooperation, communication, and empathy (Whitebread, 2012). Play-based pedagogy can also provide children with a safe and supportive learning environment that promotes emotional well-being and resilience (Roskos & Christie, 2013).

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central figure holding a staff with a flame at the top, set against a background of a sunburst. The emblem is surrounded by a banner at the bottom with the motto "EDUCATION FOR SERVICE".

Research has shown that play-based pedagogy can have a significant positive impact on children's cognitive development. According to Pellegrini (2009), play provides children with opportunities to explore, discover, and experiment, which promotes cognitive development. Play-based pedagogy can promote problem-solving skills, spatial reasoning, and creativity (Roskos & Christie, 2013). In addition, play-based pedagogy can help children develop a positive attitude towards learning and can provide a foundation for future academic success (Stacey & Sumsion, 2016).

Play-based pedagogy can also have a significant positive impact on children's social development. Play provides children with opportunities to interact with their peers and develop social skills such as cooperation, communication, and empathy (Whitebread, 2012). Play-based pedagogy can also promote positive teacher-child relationships and provide opportunities for teachers to observe and understand children's social and emotional needs (Fleer, 2013).

Research has also shown that play-based pedagogy can promote children's emotional development. Play provides children with opportunities to express and regulate their emotions and to develop self-confidence and self-esteem (Pellegrini, 2009). Play-based pedagogy can also provide children with a safe and supportive learning environment that promotes emotional well-being and resilience (Roskos & Christie, 2013).

2.5 The Views of Teachers about Play-Based Pedagogy

Views of teachers about play-based pedagogy are an important area of research as teachers are the primary implementers of this approach. Teachers' opinion towards play-based pedagogy play a critical role in the effective implementation of this approach. Teachers who view play as an important learning tool are more likely to have positive attitudes towards play-based pedagogy, while those who view play as a form of unstructured or unproductive activity may have negative attitudes towards it (Rahimi & Yaratana, 2021).

According to Fleer and Raban (2012), teachers' views of play-based pedagogy are shaped by their beliefs about the role of play in promoting children's development. Teachers who view play as a valuable learning tool are more likely to implement play-based pedagogy effectively. However, some teachers may perceive play as a

form of unstructured or unproductive activity, which can hinder the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy. Teachers own limited knowledge and comprehension of play-based pedagogy as a concept, plays role in their attitude towards practicing play pedagogy and many teachers tend to avoid play-based learning activities due to their perceptual experience ((UNICEF, 2018). It implies that teachers' beliefs and perception towards the implementation of play-based pedagogy to teaching largely depends on their cognition and understanding about the concept.

Most kindergarten teachers feel pressured by the increasing emphasis on academic outcomes, standardized testing, and accountability measures in education (Lynch, 2015). This pressure often results in teachers feeling compelled to prioritize formal instruction and assessment over play-based learning experiences. Several factors contributing to teachers' perceptions of pressure, including societal expectations, parents' demands for academic achievement, and the influence of government policies and funding priorities. Practitioners` perceived the integration of play in pre-school as a means to help children develop skills and for learning purposes. Practitioners conceptualized the use of play as an educational pedagogy tool. Nonetheless, children`s play in pre-school is often used as a time- filler and losses its purpose. Practitioners` further perceived children play as a learning process but not the final product. Simultaneously, more responsibilities are expected from practitioners in pre-school settings. The educational pedagogy of children`s play should be based on activities rather than on academic skills (Marjatta, 2002). According to Sutton- Smith (1997; as cited in Sandseter, 2009) these play activities provide children with an experience of arousal, excitement, fun, sense of belonging, joy, and light-heartedness. Children develop through play and it is the best way of learning for the future.

Accordingly, Sutton-Smith (1997) argues that, children's play provides experiences and excitements that is pleasurable, which they want to do it again. Similarly, children like to be engaged in play activities that is relevant to them. Bae (2010) also agrees that in the early years' settings, practitioners must be attentive, listen to and attempt to interpret children's body language and reactions, and must be observant in relation to their actions and in-actions, aesthetic expressions and eventually their verbal communications.

In relation to play in the classroom a 'pedagogy of play' has been built around this belief which is constructed as how Teachers make provision for play, plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Constructs for supporting or enhancing learning, otherwise known as teaching or pedagogy (the practice of teaching), have been proposed by Bernstein (1996). 'Classification' refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between subjects when subjects are clearly defined then the boundaries are strong, if subjects are merged then boundaries are weak. 'Framing' refers to the relationship between teacher and pupil and the degree of control between them.

McInnes, Howard, and Miles (2017), found that teachers perceived play-based pedagogy as an effective approach to teaching and learning that promotes children's development in a holistic manner. However, these teachers faced challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy, such as limited time, resources, and support. The role of Teachers in children's play is a complex and under-researched area and so, not surprisingly, a number of slightly different views were expressed by our European experts. On the one hand Broström and Texter expressed the view that the full potential of play can only be unlocked by active teachers or parents. On the other

hand, Baumgartner, Marín and Muchacka were of the view that children's play doesn't need Teachers supervision. Teachers should provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children's play without interfering. However, these recommendations varied mostly in response to the situation in their own country rather than in substance. So, for example, Denmark has a lot of free play in schools and teachers tend not to involve themselves or participate in children's play, and so Broström, the Danish expert, recommended more Teachers involvement and more structure, which he believes would be beneficial for children.

Dunkin and Hanna (2001) created a teaching resource, called Thinking Together. Thinking Together elaborates a range of high quality Teachers -child interactions that can occur in playful settings. The main point is that high-quality interactions are motivated by the 'genuine interest' of the Teachers in what the child is doing and are characterized by the Teachers listening and extending the child's thinking and knowledge. The latter is achieved by using open-ended question or comments, giving the child the time to respond, by being responsive to conversations initiated by the child, and using knowledge of the child to extend the interaction. These characteristics are reminiscent of 'sustained shared thinking' identified in the REPEY research in the UK (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) where Teachers and children work together 'to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend a narrative' (p. 718). Dunkin and Hanna's resource goes on to illustrate a range of roles that Teachers can adopt and that can shape the interaction and set the tone. They identify the following roles:

The facilitator: when the Teachers helps children to sustain their play by providing strategies and ideas, extends their thinking, gives children time to think and to speak,

supports recall and creates opportunities for children to make the next steps; The co-learner/co-explorer in this role the Teacher; models the role he or she would wish to see the child taking, thus enabling the child to make their own discoveries and develop problem-solving skills. The role to be modelled might include looking for resources or information, asking a more knowledgeable person for help and struggling with a problem. An important part of this role is modelling language.

The play partner; this entails the Teachers just being involved in the child's activity, joining in, enjoying it and following the actions developed by the child. The listener/decoder; in this role the Teachers listens very carefully, gives full attention to a child and gives the child time to fully explain or to show what they have been doing. But it can also mean acting as a sounding board for the child's ideas, reflecting their thinking back to them and sometimes para-phrasing the child's utterances to check if they have been accurately understood by the Teachers.

The planner; Teachers can plan to interact with particular children and to build up an interest or strength they have shown, or as part of their observation and assessment. There are overlaps between these roles and other frameworks that have been referred to in earlier sections of this review. For example, the 'facilitator' role is probably most similar to the concept of scaffolding and the 'planner' role is an example of distal guided interaction in the Plowman and Stephen framework.

Besides those activities already mentioned, the teacher and the school can actively prepare children for moving on to a new situation (Broström, 2003, 2007), plan transitional activities develop buddy programmes (Dockett & Perry, 2001) and establish strong communication between teachers of successive classes or between pre-school and school, (Margetts, 1999). Research shows that preparation for the

move from Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 has not been as widespread (Parsons & Stephenson, 2002). In children having major difficulties, Brostrom (2003) suggests that the practitioner/teacher who is well known to the child can act as a useful mediator at times. There is increasing realisation also that if practitioners and/or teachers want to know the effect of transitions on children, one useful route is to ask the children themselves (Einarsdóttir, 2007). This has been part of local research into transitions (Walsh et al., 2008). This kind of research has revealed that children have both positive and negative feelings about transitions. Positive ideas include having “real big toys up there”, learning “lots of new things” and even looking forward to added restrictions such as not talking in class and having to line up in an orderly way.

Similarly, in the context of the Singaporean early childhood education system, teachers perceived play-based pedagogy as an effective approach to teaching and learning that promotes children's development in a meaningful and engaging way, however they are faced with challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy, such as limited resources, curriculum constraints, and parental expectation (Lim and Lee, 2019).

According to Bsubikova-Mona, Hjetland and Wollscheld (2019), regarding stated that ECE teachers have different views concerning play and learning, teachers have uncertainties as to how and when to get involved. Lastly the practitioners reported on the challenges of Play-Based Learning (PBL), more importantly, policy and curricular delivery pressure. From their study, the identified gap is that the study did not focus on the challenges these practitioners face whiles implementing PBL. Another challenge of implementing play-based pedagogy is the need for teachers to change

their teaching practices and curriculum to be more play-based. This can be a difficult shift for teachers who may have been trained in more traditional, teacher-centered approaches (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). For example, teachers may need to learn new skills such as observing and documenting children's play, as well as adapting lesson plans to incorporate play-based learning activities (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015).

Pui-Wah and Stimpson (2004), also mentioned teachers claimed to must have incorporated play in their classrooms, practices do not match true play practices, and instead play in their classrooms was fixed to specific circumstances and objects and was used separately from actual learning. In their investigation of teachers' understanding of play-based pedagogy, Martlew et al. (2011) arrived at the same conclusions, a lack of cohesion in teachers' interpretations of play-based learning translated into teachers' misunderstandings of their role during play.

Also, recent studies (Einarsdottir, 2014; Fleer, 2013) have shown that early childhood teachers' understanding and views of the relation between play and learning impact greatly on their pedagogical decisions and practices such as classroom arrangement, provision of support (material and human wise) to children, instructional delivery, and their level of involvement in children's play.

Jansen and Msila (2019) investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding the role of play as a learning medium in early childhood development in South Africa. The study revealed that teachers perceived play as an essential tool for promoting children's learning and development. They believed that play-based activities can help children to develop their social skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, language skills, and emotional regulation. The study found that teachers encountered several challenges in implementing play-based pedagogical practices in their classrooms. One of the main

challenges was the lack of resources such as play materials, space, and time. The teachers also expressed concerns about their lack of training in play-based pedagogical practices and the limited support they received from school management.

It was recommended that there should be more emphasis on play-based learning in teacher training programs and in the South African curriculum. It was also suggested that policymakers should allocate more resources to early childhood education to ensure that teachers have access to the necessary resources to implement play-based pedagogical practices effectively. In conclusion, Jansen and Msila highlighted the importance of play-based learning in promoting children's development and emphasized the need for teachers to receive adequate training and support to implement play-based pedagogical practices effectively. (Jansen & Msila, 2019)

Overall, research suggests that teachers' perceptions of play-based pedagogy are shaped by their beliefs about the role of play in promoting children's development. Teachers who view play as a valuable learning tool are more likely to implement play-based pedagogy effectively. However, teachers may face challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy due to a variety of factors, such as limited time, resources, and support, as well as curriculum constraints and parental expectations.

2.6 Material or Resources availability for Play-Based Pedagogical Practices

The availability of materials and resources is an important factor in the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy.

According to Stacey and Sumsion (2016), play-based pedagogy requires a wide range of materials and resources to support children's learning and development. These materials can include open-ended materials such as blocks, play dough, and loose

parts materials, as well as more structured materials such as puzzles and board games. In addition, play-based pedagogy can benefit from the use of technology, such as interactive whiteboards and tablets, to support children's learning and engagement.

Effective play facilitation requires teachers to be attuned to children's needs and interests, to provide open-ended materials and opportunities for exploration and discovery, and to encourage children to take ownership of their play experiences (Pellegrini & Boyd, 2014, p. 210). This implies that teachers need to be responsive to children's individual interests, providing materials and opportunities that are relevant and engaging. They also need to encourage children to take ownership of their play experiences by giving them choices, allowing them to direct their own play, and supporting their ideas and creativity.

Research has shown that the availability of materials and resources can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy. For example, a study by Hobson and Healy (2011) found that the availability of a range of materials and resources was associated with increased engagement and creativity in play-based activities. Another study by the National Institute for Early Education Research (2017) found that high-quality play-based programs were more likely to have a range of materials and resources available to support children's learning and development.

However, the availability of materials and resources can be a challenge for some educators and programs. For example, programs in low-income areas may have limited funding for materials and resources, while educators in remote or rural areas may have limited access to technology (Stacey & Sumsion, 2016). In addition, some educators may lack the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate technology into play-based pedagogy (Fleer & Raban, 2012).

Within this general position it is well established that materials and toys support play most effectively when they are open and flexible and provide children with a wealth of opportunities for creativity, for social interaction with their peers and adults, for authorship and for deep engagement (Gauntlett et al., 2010). However, beyond this there is currently a paucity of research as to the qualities of specific types of materials and toys, related to the different types of play, which most effectively support playfulness, learning and development. Recent studies by Howard and colleagues, for example, have shown that a key factor in children engaging with and learning most effectively from activities with toys and other materials, is that they perceive the situation to be playful (Howard, 2002; McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011).

Also, in a study conducted by Kamau (2016), reveals that high cost of learning materials and poor classroom environment impede the implementation of play-based pedagogy in schools. Again, it was indicated that inadequate resources in school sometimes prevent teachers from practicing play-based method in their classroom.

Despite these challenges, there are examples of programs and educators that have successfully implemented play-based pedagogy with limited resources. For example, a study by Casler-Failing and Martin (2016) examined the use of recycled materials in a play-based program and found that the use of recycled materials provided children with opportunities for creativity and problem-solving. Similarly, a study by Talaat (2018) examined the use of traditional materials such as clay and sand in a play-based program in a low-income area and found that these materials provided children with opportunities for sensory exploration and self-expression.

In conclusion, the availability of materials and resources is an important factor in the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy. While the availability of materials

and resources can be a challenge for some educators and programs, there are examples of successful implementation with limited resources. Educators can use a variety of materials and resources, including traditional and recycled materials, to support children's learning and development in a play-based environment.

2.7 How Trained Teachers' are regarding Play-Based Pedagogical Practices

Effective facilitation of play requires a deep understanding of children's developmental needs and interests, as well as the ability to scaffold play experiences to support children's learning and development (Jones & Reynolds, 2010, p. 6). It implies that teachers need to be familiar with the stages of child development and the different types of play that are appropriate for each stage. It requires teachers to scaffold children's play experiences by providing support and guidance that is tailored to their individual needs, in order to promote their learning and development.

One of the challenges that teachers face in implementing play-based pedagogy is the pressure to meet academic standards. In the US and other countries, standardized testing has become a prominent feature of the education system, which can create tension between the use of play-based pedagogy and the need to prepare students for standardized tests (Tsao & Fetters, 2018). Similarly, in Australia, there is a tension between the use of play-based pedagogy and the need to meet curriculum requirements (Brinkman, Fowler, & Matthews, 2018).

Teachers also face challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy due to a lack of training and support. Play-based pedagogy requires a different approach to teaching and learning compared to traditional didactic methods, and some teachers may lack the training and support they need to effectively implement this approach (Tsao & Fetters, 2018). In addition, teachers may lack the resources they need to implement

play-based pedagogy, such as a wide range of materials and equipment (Stacey & Sumsion, 2016).

A study by Lyabwene (2010) in Tanzania indicated that issues of pre-primary school teachers' professional qualifications affected the quality of classroom interaction, hence, impacting on teaching and learning approaches significantly. The complaints are raised by different ECE stakeholders on the unaddressed pedagogical challenges, especially teachers' tendency of using compulsive, direct and unfriendly teacher-centered teaching strategies (United Republic of Tanzania URT, 2008).

Moreover, a study conducted by Ntumi (2016), reveals that teachers are not effectively trained to cope with the early childhood curriculum put in place by the Ministry of Education. Yet, the ECE unit of Ghana Education Service attest to training programs being implemented to build the capacity of kindergarten teachers to operationalize the curriculum and increase teaching methodology (Okai and Amoah, 2016). This is confirming the same problem faced by Yilo-krobo ECE teachers in the Municipality. According to a study by Fleer and Raban (2012), teacher beliefs and attitudes towards play-based pedagogy can vary depending on their experiences and training. The study found that teachers who had received training in play-based pedagogy were more likely to have positive attitudes towards this approach. Similarly, a study by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) found that early childhood educators who had a strong belief in the value of play were more likely to use play-based pedagogy in their teaching practices.

However, some teachers may hold negative attitudes towards play-based pedagogy due to a lack of understanding or misconceptions about its effectiveness (Rahimi & Yaratan, 2021). In addition, teachers may face challenges in implementing play-based

pedagogy due to external factors such as curriculum requirements and pressure to meet academic standards (Tsao & Fetters, 2018).

Even with these challenges, research has shown that play-based pedagogy can have positive outcomes for children when implemented effectively. For example, a study by Tarman and Temiz (2019) found that a play-based approach to teaching mathematics improved children's attitudes towards mathematics and their understanding of mathematical concepts. Similarly, a study by Janssen, Littleton, and Mercer (2013) found that play-based pedagogy can promote collaborative learning and problem-solving skills.

To effectively implement play-based pedagogy, it is important for teachers to have a positive attitude towards this approach and to receive training and support in its implementation. Providing teachers with opportunities for professional development and collaboration with peers can help to promote positive attitudes and effective implementation of play-based pedagogy (Fleer & Raban, 2012).

Despite these challenges, there are examples of successful implementation of play-based pedagogy with positive outcomes for children. For example, a study by Tarman and Temiz (2019) found that a play-based approach to teaching mathematics improved children's attitudes towards mathematics and their understanding of mathematical concepts. Similarly, a study by Janssen, Littleton, and Mercer (2013) found that play-based pedagogy can promote collaborative learning and problem-solving skills.

Teachers who use play-based pedagogy need to be aware of the unique challenges that arise when managing a classroom that is focused on play. According to a study by

Stacey and Sumsion (2016), effective classroom management in a play-based environment requires teachers to be responsive to children's needs and interests, and to be able to balance children's play with the need for structure and routine.

In addition to being responsive to children's needs, effective classroom management in a play-based environment requires clear communication and expectations. According to a study by Copple and Bredekamp (2009), teachers need to establish clear rules and routines for play-based activities, and to communicate these expectations to children and parents. This helps to create a safe and predictable environment that supports children's learning and development.

Effective classroom management in a play-based environment also requires teachers to be skilled in observing and assessing children's play. According to a study by Hobson and Healy (2011), teachers who are skilled in observing and assessing children's play are better able to identify children's strengths and needs, and to adapt their teaching practices accordingly.

To effectively manage a play-based classroom, teachers also need to be skilled in building positive relationships with children and families. According to a study by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004), positive teacher-child relationships are critical to the success of play-based pedagogy, as they create a foundation of trust and support that promotes children's learning and development

In conclusion, teachers may face challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy, such as pressure to meet academic standards and a lack of training, support, and resources. However, there are examples of successful implementation of play-based pedagogy with positive outcomes for children. Providing teachers with training,

support, and resources can help to promote the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy and improve outcomes for children.

2.8 Strategies of Improving Play-Based Pedagogical Practices

In today's educational landscape, where academic standards are prevalent and play-based teaching methods are mandatory, kindergarten teachers are faced with the challenging task of finding ways to effectively incorporate play into their classrooms (Jenvey & Jenvey, 2002; Martlew, Stephen & Ellis, 2011; Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012). With the increasing emphasis on academic achievement in early childhood curricula, these teachers must strike a balance between teaching academic skills and using developmentally appropriate play-based teaching strategies (Martlew et al., 2011; Pyle & Luce-Kapler, 2014).

Pedagogy (and pedagogical interactions) concerns how adults in early years settings engage with children to achieve developmental objectives, and what directs their methods. Specifically, pedagogy refers to “that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment” (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). It concerns the how of adult and child interaction, which is particularly important in an early childhood education centers context, given how children learn and develop during early childhood. How children learn and develop at this stage is subject not only to what is taught but more importantly, how it is facilitated (Anders, 2015). Consequently, pedagogy has a significant effect upon the (process) quality of early childhood education centers and the impact early childhood education centers can have on

children. Effective pedagogies facilitate positive interactions, by structuring environments and planning activities that fully engage children. This in turn enhances the children's cognitive, linguistic and social development, since positive relationships have the most consistent and enduring influence on a child's development (Bowman et al., 2001; Shonkoff and Philips, 2000).

“Characteristics of effective pedagogy include nurturing and consistent relationships, child- and age-appropriate behaviour, a positive class- or playroom environment, and domain-specific stimulation in areas such as verbal and pre-reading literacy, early numeracy, and science (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000)” p. 125.

Naturally, pedagogical practices, techniques or strategies differ across countries and cultures. These may vary between national and regional contexts, and between individual early childhood education centers settings (OECD, 2014b). Gooch (2008) stresses the significance of teachers permitting children to establish the aims of their playtime and abstaining from hijacking or subverting the children's intentions by enforcing predetermined curricular standards. Teachers have varying roles in play-based situations which add to the difficulty of integrating play into classroom settings. In addition to determining the type of play to encourage and the environmental conditions that can foster beneficial play, teachers must also decide how much they will participate in these playful settings.

Play-based pedagogical practices have been recognized as an effective way to enhance children's learning and development in early childhood centers (Early Childhood Centers) (Van Hoorn et al., 2017). However, it is important to continuously improve and update these practices to ensure that they are meeting the

needs of the children and the expectations of the parents and teachers. According to Bodrova and Leong (2017), Early Childhood Centers should incorporate children's interests and experiences into play activities which will prioritize children's interests and experiences when planning play-based activities. This is because children are more likely to be actively involved in activities that align with their interests, which results in them being more motivated to learn. This helps to make the activities more engaging and meaningful for the children, which in turn enhances their learning and development. It is crucial in play-based pedagogical practices, as it promotes engagement, motivation, and meaningful learning experiences for young children.

Two educational approaches have prevailed in the field of early education, the direct instruction approach, in which learning is teacher-directed, and the child-centered approach, in which learning is play-based and child-directed (Stipek, Daniels, Galluzzo, Millburn, & Salmon, 1998). Do children learn best through direct instruction? Or, is play the best context to promote learning? These questions represent a longstanding debate in the field of early education. Although the majority of early education programs today promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play, we lack evidence-based guidelines regarding the amount of emphasis that should be placed on each to maximize children's learning and development.

The direct instruction approach to early childhood education is derived from behaviorist theories that suggest that children should master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur (Glickman, 1984). Further, it is believed that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice (Engelmann & Carnine, 1982). Accordingly, the direct instruction approach views learning as

teacher- directed rather than child-directed. Marcon (1999) described the direct instruction approach as being highly prescriptive in that lessons can be “(a) scripted to assure consistency in presentation across teachers, (b) carefully sequenced with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring student progress, and (c) consistently focused on academic instruction with much of the available school day allocated to practice and drills in reading, language, and math” (p. 1). The direct instruction approach has also been defined as teacher-led sessions utilized to teach basic skills with a focus on repetition and practice in individual, small-, and large-group contexts (Golbeck, 2001).

Grounded in constructivist theories, such as the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), the child-centered approach to early childhood education views learning as child- directed rather than teacher-directed (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Instead of enforcing a core set of basic skills, the child-entered approach is based on the idea that children learn basic skills when they have freedom to think, experience, explore, question, and search for answers about the world through self-directed play. Within this approach two types of play can occur: free play and guided play. In free play, children can “freely decide” what to do, with whom, and in what area of the classroom (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Pellegrini, 2009; Sutton-Smith, 2001). In comparison, during guided play, children’s natural curiosity, exploration, and play are thought to be guided by the teachers to promote learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For example, teachers may build on children’s self-directed play during guided play by asking questions or expanding on children’s observations.

Educators who adopt a child-centered approach to early education view children’s play as “the preeminent educational activity of early childhood because play is

thought to support the learning of important school readiness related skills (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 57). For example, as children make substitutions during play (e.g., using a cardboard box to represent a bus), children gain the cognitive ability to separate the meaning of an object from the concrete object. Recently educators and academic scholars have begun to draw distinctions between two types of play within the child-centered approach: free play and guided play. Free play is voluntary and child-driven, such that children independently decide what to do, with whom, and in what area of the classroom. Guided play is also child-driven; however, during guided play, teachers are present and they are thought to guide children's exploration and learning by asking questions and expanding on children's own observations (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Ginsburg (2007), added that there should be the use of open-ended materials such as blocks, clay, and loose parts allow children to use their imaginations and creativity in their play. These materials also promote problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. For instance, young children can use blocks and loose parts to build simple structures, while older children can create more complex designs. The use of open-ended materials also allows children to work at their own pace, which fosters independence and self-regulation.

Moreover, open-ended materials support the development of executive function skills, which are essential for success in school and life. These skills include working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. For example, when children engage in clay play, they must remember and follow multi-step directions, regulate their emotions and impulses, and switch between different modes of thinking to create their designs.

Open-ended materials also foster a sense of autonomy and ownership over children's learning. When given the opportunity to choose their materials and direct their play, children become active participants in their learning. This sense of agency promotes intrinsic motivation, which is crucial for lifelong learning and engagement.

In conclusion, the use of open-ended materials in children's play has numerous benefits for their development, including promoting imagination, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking, executive function skills, autonomy, and ownership over their learning. As educators and caregivers, it is essential to provide children with ample opportunities to explore and engage with open-ended materials to support their holistic growth and development. According to Pyle and Bigelow (2021), involving children in the planning and implementation of play-based learning can enhance their engagement and learning outcomes.

Early Childhood Centers' should provide a balance between structured and unstructured play. Structured play involves activities that have a specific goal or outcome, while unstructured play allows children to explore and create on their own (Roskos & Christie, 2013). This is crucial for promoting children's holistic development in early childhood settings. Structured play involves activities that are guided by adults or have specific objectives and rules, such as teacher-led games or academic activities. These activities provide children with opportunities to learn new skills, follow directions, and practice social interactions. Structured play is also useful for developing specific areas of development, such as fine motor skills, language and literacy, and math and science concepts.

On the other hand, unstructured play allows children to freely explore their environment and engage in open-ended activities that are not directed by adults. This

type of play fosters creativity, imagination, problem-solving skills, and self-regulation. Unstructured play can take many forms, such as pretend play, outdoor play, sensory play, and loose parts play. When children engage in unstructured play, they have the freedom to make their own choices, direct their play, and follow their interests, which enhances their sense of agency and ownership over their learning.

A balance between structured and unstructured play is essential because both types of play support different aspects of children's development. Structured play provides children with the opportunity to learn specific skills and concepts, while unstructured play promotes creativity, self-expression, and social-emotional development. Moreover, a balance between structured and unstructured play ensures that children's play experiences are varied and engaging, which enhances their motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

In summary, providing a balance between structured and unstructured play in early childhood settings is crucial for promoting children's holistic development. Structured play provides children with specific learning opportunities, while unstructured play fosters creativity, imagination, and self-regulation. As such, educators and caregivers should provide children with ample opportunities for both types of play to support their growth and development. These two forms of play are well effective for early childhood educators to use in their classroom teaching to help young children understand concept better.

In a report titled "Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki," the New Zealand Ministry of Education outlines a range of strategies for improving play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centers. The report emphasizes the importance of providing children with a range of play-based learning experiences that

are responsive to their interests and needs, and highlights the need for teachers to be skilled in observing and documenting children's play to inform their teaching practices (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In a study by the Swedish National Agency for Education, researchers examined the implementation of play-based pedagogical practices in Swedish preschools. The study found that successful implementation of play-based practices required strong leadership, ongoing professional development for teachers, and a focus on creating a supportive learning environment that promoted child-led play (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). In a report titled "Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia," the Australian government outlines a range of strategies for improving play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood education. The framework emphasizes the importance of play-based learning experiences in promoting children's holistic development, and provides guidance for teachers on how to design and implement play-based learning experiences that are responsive to children's interests and needs (Department of Education and Training, 2017). In a study by the Finnish National Board of Education, researchers examined the role of nature-based learning in early childhood education. The study found that nature-based learning experiences, such as outdoor play and nature walks, were highly valued by both teachers and children, and were seen as promoting creativity, imagination, and well-being (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015).

In a study published in the journal *Early Childhood Education Journal*, researchers examined the implementation of play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood education in the United States. The study found that successful implementation of play-based practices required a strong commitment from educators and

administrators, ongoing professional development for teachers, and a focus on building supportive relationships with families (Bundy et al., 2019).

Overall, these studies and reports highlight the importance of early childhood education as a period which is crucial in shaping children's cognitive and social development as it is during this time that the brain is most receptive to learning and developing skills. The literature also emphasized the relevance and effectiveness of play-based pedagogy as a developmental appropriate pedagogy for teaching young children. Also, concerning teachers views about Play Based Pedagogy (PBP), literatures revealed that teachers' views have much influence on their teaching and that if their views about it is good, it brings positive result and vice-vise. It was also discussed that PBP requires adequate teaching and learning material to make learning effective for learners. Research has shown that the availability of materials and resources can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy and also increases creativity. When teachers are provided with training, support, and resources can help to promote the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy and improve outcomes for children and emphasize the need for ongoing professional development and support for teachers to effectively implement play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centers. In addition, literature was revealed under materials available in teaching children at early childhood centers, highlights were made on the fact that Teaching and Learning Resources should be flexible, adequate and consist of variates to arouse children's interest in learning and ensure active participation among learners. Finally, on the strategies teachers use in implementing play-based pedagogy, literature highlights that pedagogical practices, and strategies differ across countries and cultures. Literature explained the direct approach of teaching and the child-centered approach or strategy. Literature revealed

the relevance and the need for the child-centered strategy especially in the context of play-based pedagogy within the early childhood center.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research philosophy, research approach, research design, setting, sample and sampling technique, and the procedure for collecting data. Other issues discussed in the chapter are the research instruments for data collection, pre-testing of instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, and ethical issues about the research.

3.1 Research Philosophy

For the purpose of this study, the Interpretivist paradigm, also known as the constructivist paradigm, is a research approach that emphasizes the subjective interpretation of social phenomena and the importance of understanding the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). This study employed the interpretivist paradigm which is based on understanding the real construction of concepts and meanings within actual settings used by social actors (Gephart, 2004). The Interpretivist paradigm is particularly useful in exploring complex social phenomena, such as the challenges faced by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, and can provide several benefits for this type of study. Using the interpretive approach, the researcher conducted the study using an interview guide to obtain the qualitative data.

One benefit of the Interpretivist paradigm is its emphasis on the subjective experience of individuals and the importance of understanding their perspectives and meanings. As such, the Interpretivist paradigm is useful in exploring the challenges faced by

teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy, as it allows for a deeper understanding of their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. This approach enables researcher to uncover the nuances and complexities of the implementation process and to explore the factors that influence teachers' attitudes and behaviors (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research shares the theoretical assumptions of the interpretive paradigm which is based on the notion that social reality is created and sustained through the subjective experience of people involved in communication (Morgan, 1980). The interpretive paradigm helps researches with deep understanding of situations or behaviour from the perspectives of the people being studied rather than explaining behaviour through cause and effect (Grbich, 2007).

Interpretive paradigm argues that social reality is created jointly through meaningful interaction between the researcher and the researched on agreement and also acknowledges the feelings, experiences and viewpoints of researchers. Ting-Toomey (2008) points out three characteristics of qualitative inquiry. These characteristics include; the interpretive nature, contextual sensitivity, and emergent design. The researcher believe that reality consist of people's subjective experiences of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed.

According to Aldridge and Fraser (2016), an Interpretivist approach is useful in exploring teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards play-based pedagogy. The study found that teachers' beliefs about play and its role in children's learning influenced their attitudes towards play-based pedagogy, and that understanding these beliefs was essential in promoting the adoption of play-based pedagogy.

In addition, the Interpretivist paradigm emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and the researcher's role in shaping the research process. This approach encourages researcher to critically reflect on their assumptions, values, and biases, and to acknowledge the subjective nature of their interpretations (Creswell, 2014). This reflexivity can lead to a more rigorous and transparent research process, as researcher are more aware of their own perspectives and the ways in which they may influence the research findings. Interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation, thus to observe is to collect information about events, while to interpret is to make meaning of that information by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern (Aikenhead, 1997).

Reeves and Hedberg (2003, p. 32) note that the “interpretivist” paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. The study was anchored in the interpretivist paradigm because the paradigm helped the researcher to get deeper understanding into the challenges teachers face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

3.2 Research Approach

The study employed the qualitative approach of conducting research. The qualitative approach is a research approach that emphasizes the exploration of subjective experiences and the meanings that people attribute to their experiences. This approach is particularly useful in exploring complex social phenomena, such as the challenges faced by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The Qualitative approach provides several benefits

for this type of study. Since qualitative approach allows the researcher to ask questions that comes in textual form to understand human experience, it was needful employing this approach for the study. In the view of Kusi (2012), qualitative researchers aim to understand ‘depth’ rather than ‘breadth’ or explore a phenomenon in detail. They are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

One benefit of the Qualitative approach is its ability to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of teachers. This approach allows for open-ended questions and flexible data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, which enable researcher to gather rich and nuanced data on teachers' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2014).

Wang and Li (2019), confirm that, Qualitative approach was useful in exploring teachers' attitudes and experiences towards play-based pedagogy in a Chinese early childhood education setting. The study found that the Qualitative approach provided a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences and perspectives, which helped to identify the factors that influenced their attitudes towards play-based pedagogy.

The task of qualitative research is to gain insights into constructions of reality, i.e., to tease out the nature of the world as it is experienced, structured and interpreted by people in the course of their everyday lives (Cropley, 2019). According to Kombo and Tromp (2006) clarify that qualitative research is a form of research that involves description to the data obtained. It seeks to describe and analyse the behaviour of groups from the point of view of those being studied.

3.3 Research Design

Exploratory case study design was employed for this study. Case Study is a qualitative research approach that involves the in-depth exploration of a specific case, such as the challenges faced by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The design was considered appropriate to ascertain the challenges teachers face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers. Case study research involves a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular event, situation, organization, or social unit. Typically, a case has a defined space and time frame: “a phenomenon of some sort in a bounded context” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 28). The specific type of case study used for this study is exploratory case study which allows the researcher to explore the actual situation on ground.

One benefit of the Exploratory Case Study approach is its ability to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the implementation process. This approach allows researcher to explore the implementation of play-based pedagogy in a specific context, which can provide insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder implementation. One strength of the case study approach is that it can capture and explore the complexity of a phenomenon for better understanding. This is what large-scale quantitative studies including a survey fail to achieve because, in most cases, they collect superficial information about a phenomenon for generalization (Kusi, 2012). Another strength of case study approach is action-centered and, therefore, the findings are useful for improving practice (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003). Notwithstanding these strengths, the case study approach has been critiqued in diverse ways, this includes the fact that the findings are difficult to generalise. This is because such studies often concentrate on an instance or a few instances of a phenomenon and

involve a relatively small sample size. Given the fact that the advantages of using the case study approach in this study outweigh the disadvantages, the case study approach was considered more appropriate for the study.

3.4 Study Area

The study area of the study is the Yilo-Krobo Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Yilo-Krobo Municipality is a rural Municipality with a population of approximately 126,000 people, according to the 2010 population and housing census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The Municipality is known for its agricultural activities, with farming being the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality is relatively underdeveloped, with a limited number of formal ECE centers. According to a study by Darkwa and Lartey (2018), the quality of ECE services in the Municipality is poor, with inadequate facilities and resources, low teacher qualifications, and limited access to training and professional development opportunities.

The implementation of play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality is a relatively new concept, with many challenges and barriers to its implementation. Some of these challenges include the limited understanding and skills of teachers in facilitating play-based learning, the lack of resources and materials to support play-based learning, and the cultural and societal beliefs about the importance of academic outcomes over play-based learning.

Given the challenges faced by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, there is a need for research that explores these challenges and identifies effective strategies for promoting the implementation of play-based pedagogy. The study area of the study, therefore, provides an ideal setting for exploring these issues and developing effective strategies for promoting the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Municipality.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, and to identify effective strategies for promoting the implementation of play-based pedagogy. The study area of the Yilo-Krobo Municipality is an important location for this research, as it provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing play-based pedagogy in a rural Municipality in Ghana

3.5 Population

The target population of the study was 148 teachers teaching in Early Childhood Centers (ECCs) with 60 kindergarten (Kg) teachers in the Yilo-Krobo *Municipality* (*Source: Yilo-Krobo Municipal Educational Directorate*). The 60 Kg teachers served as the target population for the study and, the researcher used the two sampling techniques (Purposive criterion sampling and convenient sampling) to get 20 Kg teachers as the accessible population for the study. The teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality are an important population for this study, as they have first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities of implementing play-based pedagogy in this context. Agyedu, Donkor and Obeng (2011), defined population in research as the complete set of individuals (subjects), objects or events with common observable features for which a researcher is interested in studying. It is also regarded as the

larger group from which individuals are selected to participate in a study. A population is also defined as a group of individuals or people with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested (Blanche, 1999). Kusi (2012, p. 80) defines target population as “a group of individuals that the researcher generalizes his/her findings”.

3.6 Sample

The researcher sampled 13 kindergarten teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. This number was achieved from the point at which no new information or themes emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2006). Typically, data saturation is reached after 12-20 participants have been interviewed in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006). However, the sample size may vary depending on the complexity of the research question and the diversity of the participants. In this study, saturation was reached on the 13th person

According to Alvi (2006), a sample can be defined as a group of relatively smaller number of people selected from a population for investigation purpose (p.12). In research, it is impossible to assess every single element of a population so a group of people (smaller in number than the population) is selected for the assessment. On the basis of information obtained from the sample, the conclusions are drawn for the population. The more the sample is representative of the population, the higher is the accuracy of the inferences and better are the results generalizable. A sample is said to be representative when the characteristics of elements selected are similar to that of entire target population. The results are said to be generalizable when the findings obtained from the sample are equally true for the entire target population (Alvi, 2016, p.12).

Sample size determination for qualitative research has varied approaches. However, some scholars on the determination of appropriate sample size for qualitative study have proposed varied approaches. For example, Glaser and Strauss (1971) proposes the concept of saturation as very relevant in determining sample size for qualitative study. Saturation here implies a situation where data obtained from any additional respondent or sample will not provide any new information to what has already been obtained from research participants. Mason (2010) and Charmaz (2006) recommend the need for researchers to consider availability of resources, time and study objectives in determining the appropriate sample size for qualitative study.

3.7 Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling and convenient sampling technique were used to select early childhood education teachers in Yilo-krobo municipality for the study since they experience, and academic qualification are relevant in answering the research questions. The purposive sampling was used because the researcher wanted to get or sample respondents who have ideas, knowledge and expertise and experiences about play-based pedagogy. The purposive criteria which was used to select participants were:

- a. teachers who have academic qualification in early childhood education and
- b. also have a teaching experience of three (3) to four (4) years after the implementation of the new curriculum.

This sampling technique seeks to select participants in a strategic way because of their experience or knowledge relevant to the research questions that are posed. The sampling technique was used because the researcher wanted to get or sample

respondents who have ideas, knowledge and expertise and experiences about play-based pedagogy.

To be included in the study, one must be an early childhood educator with a teaching experience of 3-4 years after the implementation of the new standard based curriculum which placed much emphasis on play-based pedagogy as a teaching method for early graders and also must have pursued early childhood education program at the college of education or university. Patton (2002), explained purposive sampling technique as the sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study. Choosing the purposive sample is fundamental to the quality of data gathered; thus, reliability and competence of the informant must be ensured.

Convenient Sampling on the other hand is the sampling technique that involves the use of elements of a target group that the researcher has access to or are available to serve as the respondents. It is a non-random sampling method that selects participants who are readily available and accessible to the researcher (Patton, 2015). Kuranchie (2021), also attested that convenience sampling technique is used based on the accessibility of a sample available to the researcher within the limited time and resources at his/her disposal. It requires the willingness of the participants to freely participate in the study to provide the needed data. In this study, The researcher selected EC educators that are accessible and have agreed to participate.

3.8 Data Collection Instrument

In this study, the researcher used a Semi-structured Interview guide to collect data from the participants. The Semi-structured Interview guide is a flexible data collection tool that allows for open-ended questions and follow-up probes (Creswell, 2014). The

kind of interview done on the field was the face-to-face interview. The interview was conducted in the following schools; Abrewanko M/A primary school, New Somanya M/A primary school, Korm L/A school, Somanya Presby School, Gonse Basic school, Sakyi Agyakwa L/A primary school, Abensu community M/A Basic school, Ashma Basic school, Agormanya R/C Basic school, Odupongkpehe Basic school, New Somanya Methodist Basic school, Yilo states schools, Somanya R/C JHS etc. The interview guide had all items that addressed all the research questions which included exploring teachers' views, availability of material resources, training level of teachers and the strategies they used in the implementation of play-based pedagogy. The Semi-structured Interview guide will enable the researcher to collect detailed and nuanced data.

Interview as a method of collecting data involves presentation of oral or verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral-verbal responses. This method can be used through personal interviews and if possible, through telephone interview (Prakashan, 2003). An interview involves the oral or vocal questioning technique or discussion. Through this interaction the required data on teachers' perception about inclusion of learners with special needs were collected for the aim of fulfilling the study objectives. According to Borg and Gall (2003), an interview as a research instrument involves the collection of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals. Its principal strength is its adaptability to any given situation. In semi-structured interviews, a researcher employs a detailed but not rigid interview guide. This involves a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent to minimize the possibility of bias on the part of the researcher/interviewer (Borg & Gall, 2003).

3.9 Trustworthiness of the Interviews

Trustworthiness is an essential criterion for ensuring the quality and credibility of qualitative research. To ensure trustworthiness in this study the researcher adhered to the constructs proposed by Guba (1989), namely credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, which some authors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Shenton, 2004; Morrow, 2005) opined correspond to internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity respectively, in quantitative research. The steps taken by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness of the interview.



3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are accurate and trustworthy (Creswell, 2014). To ensure credibility, the researcher became familiar with the participants by building a rapport with them at the beginning of each interview session and presented to them an informed consent form which explained in detail the essence of the study and their right to voluntary participation and withdrawal. The researcher also included direct quotations from the text in the presentation of the findings, which according to Graneheim and Lundman (2004) also reflected the credibility of a study. Also, throughout the period of the study there were regular discussions between the researcher and the research supervisor, and during these sessions, we deliberated on the best approach and methodology for the study as well as the instruments for data collection. The researcher again did pre-reading of the transcribed interview data severally to ensure the right data are captured and used for analysis. Member checking was also done to ensure that research participants confirm their interpretation of the data which were provided earlier on to ensure the validity of the findings.. At the end of the transcription process, data were also presented to the research supervisor for her to add his expert knowledge to it. The researcher also used Purposive and Convenient Sampling to select a diverse range of participants that represented the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

3.9.2 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985), stated that dependability “seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced changes; this means taking note of the changes in data and those made by the researcher during the process of data analysis” (p. 299). To ensure dependability, the

researcher kept detailed records of the data collection process, including field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts. The researcher ensured that she puts aside her opinion in the analysis of the data by reading the transcripts over and over again, such that the researcher became familiar with the ideas therein, which was evident in the description of the data analysis process, which was presented in the report. The researcher maintained an audit trail of the data analysis process, including the codes and categories developed, to ensure transparency and consistency.

3.9.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other contexts (Creswell, 2014). According to Morrow (2005), this implied the extent to which the findings from a particular study can be applied to wider situations. However, Shenton (2004) contended that since qualitative studies consider only a small population, it is difficult to say that their findings can be applied to wider situations. Bassegy (1981) posited that the findings can only be applied when the situations and populations are considered to be similar to those used in the study. To determine this, Firestone (1993) suggested that the researcher provided adequate information on the general design and approach of the research, so as to guide readers to make informed decisions on its transference.

To ensure transferability, the researcher provided a detailed description of the circumstances and participants to be applied to others' situations. The researcher also provided a comprehensive description of the methods and time for data collection and analysis process, including the codes and categories developed as well as the entire course of the field investigation in the study, to enable other researcher to apply the findings to other contexts. "By providing thick descriptions of the participants'

demographic data, election criteria and the context of the study to enable readers to understand the demographics of the participants” (Fobi, 2023, p. 100). The participants who were sampled had the relevant experience and were able to provide the needed data on play-based pedagogy.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability means ensuring that the findings reflect the experiences of the participants and not the prejudices or bias of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability in this study, the researcher kept detailed record of the research activities (Fobi, 2023). Further, the researcher provided an audit trail that details each step of data analysis and shows that findings aren't colored by conscious or unconscious bias but accurately portray the participants' responses. Confirmability of qualitative data was assured by the researcher by checking and rechecking data throughout data collection and analysis to ensure results would likely be repeatable by others. This was documented by a clear coding schema that identifies the codes and patterns identified in analyses.

The researcher used reflexivity, which involves reflecting on the researcher's biases and pre-conceptions, to enhance the objectivity and neutrality of the findings.

3.10 Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood was sent to the Yilo-Krobo Educational Directorate to introduce the researcher. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The researcher had a general plan for interviewing based on the research questions, but the general plan did not prevent the researcher from asking further questions during the actual process of interviewing. The

researcher secured the participants' prior consent to record the interviews. The audio recording, in part, facilitated the researcher's review and analysis of the research data.

Having secured permission, the researcher made initial visits to the schools to schedule dates and times the participants will be ready for the interview and to enable the researcher plan for the days to conduct interviews in thirteen teachers in the thirteen (13) circuits in the municipality. Within the two weeks, six (6) visits were made to the school in the process of gathering the data from the participants. The interview was conducted on teachers in the 13 circuits of the municipality. In all, thirteen (13) participants were involved in the interview. The researcher personally visited the participants and interviewed them with the help of a semi-structured interview guide. The participants were interviewed on one-on-one basis to prevent any external influences. The one-on-one interview section was aimed at gathering responses from the participants on their views of play-based pedagogy, the materials available to them, their training level in regards to play-based pedagogy and the strategies they use to implement play-based pedagogies in their classroom. Questions were mostly asked using English language. However, if the need be, questions were asked using Ghanaian language (Twi). These languages helped in ensuring good understanding of the interview questions by all the respondents. In order to avoid boredom, the interviews would take 25 minutes for each of the respondents. The first five minutes of the interview time was used to establish rapport between the researcher and respondents. Probes were used when necessary. Interviews were recorded for future references. Also, field notes were taken in the form of jotted notes as the interview continues. Jotted notes are the brief notes researcher take in circumstances where they cannot write a comprehensive set of notes.

3.11 Method of Data Analysis

Glesne (2016) defines data analysis as the effort of researchers to manage and make sense of their data to transform it from its acquired form into a form that communicates the promise of a study's findings. The data analysis for this study involved a process of coding, categorization, and interpretation of the data collected through the Semi-structured Interview guide. The analysis was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study, and was aimed to identify the challenges teachers face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy in ECCs in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. It is a transformation process (from organisation to meaning) that involves a three-tier approach: description, analysis, and interpretation.

In the description, the researcher stays close to the data that was originally collected. The first step in the data analysis process was to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews and observations. According to Glesne (2016), descriptive language portrays the contexts in which events transpired.

In the analysis, key issues about the study were identified by listening to the interviews over and over again. The transcriptions from the interviews were also read over several times to make interpretations.

Next, the data was coded, which involves identifying key concepts and themes that emerge from the data. The coding process was conducted using a grounded theory approach, which involves allowing the data to guide the development of codes and categories (Charmaz, 2014). Once the codes and categories have been developed, the data was organized and categorized according to the themes and concepts identified in the coding process. This will involve grouping the data into meaningful categories and subcategories, which will provide a framework for the analysis of the data.

Through this process, the researcher was able to identify emerging issues. This emerging issues served as themes for the analysis.

In the interpretation, the data analysis process was to interpret the data, which involves making sense of the data and drawing conclusions based on the findings. The interpretation process involved identifying patterns and connections between the data, and exploring the relationships between the data and the research questions and objectives of the study.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Halai (2006) opined that there are laid down principles and guidelines for conducting studies in an ethically appropriate manner which require researchers to obtain approval from gatekeepers and from the participants. Ethics refers to questions of right and wrong. A researcher must ask if it is right or wrong to conduct a certain study or investigate a certain question. Ethical matters are important in carrying out a research work. Ethical considerations for the study took the following procedures: Access, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. This helped to avoid unnecessary pain or distress, fear and harm among respondents and enabled the researcher build trust among the participants on the field.

3.12.1 Access

An introductory letter from the Head of Department of Early Childhood of the University of Education, Winneba was obtained to enable approval from respondents. After an approval was granted, date, time and place was fix for the interviews.

3.12.2 Informed consent

Respondents needed to be furnished with accurate and complete information on the goal(s) and procedures of the investigation so that they fully understand and in turn decide whether to participate or not (Phopalia, 2010). This makes informed consent a necessary prerequisite to any research in which human beings are involved as respondents. In this study, the researcher clearly spell out the purpose, the intend use of the data and its significance to the respondents. Each of the respondents were made to willingly decide to take part in the study.

3.12.3 Confidentiality

According to Orodho (2005), confidentiality “indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner” (p. 67). This definition implies that the researcher must jealously guard all the information disclosed by the respondents so that only the researcher has access to it. Before data collection, respondents were assured that data would be kept confidentially. In doing so, the researcher ensured that the data obtained was under a lock on the researcher’s laptop as a protected file, preventing outsiders from reading or editing the transcribed data.

3.12.4 Anonymity

The interviewees well-being and interests were protected. Respondents’ identified in the study would be masked or blinded as far as possible (Orodho, 2005). The people who read the research and the researcher will not be able to “identify a given response with a given respondent” (Mertens, 2010, p. 65). Respondents were encouraged not to mention any identifiable information while telling their stories. Besides, codes were assigned to the responses from the interviews. In order to avoid plagiarism, secondary information from books, journals, newspapers, and online theses that supplied

significant literature on the topic were properly credited and well references together with the support of empirical review of review of related literature.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings of the study. The results are discussed in relation with relevant literature. The study sought to explore the challenges teachers' face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in the Yilo-krobo Municipality.

The results are presented and analyzed in two sections namely section A and section B. Section A deals with the demographic data while the section B concerns the main data.

4.1 Section A: Demographic Data of Participants

This section shows the socio-demographic data on respondents' gender, highest academic qualification, and years of teaching experience.

4.1.1: Results of demographic data of participants

The results on the academic qualification of respondent revealed that four of them were diploma holders, eight of the respondents were bachelor degree holders, and the remaining one was master's degree holder. This means that the academic qualification of majority of the respondents was degree. This suggests that the majority of the respondents have the needed content and pedagogical knowledge to provide and promote play-based pedagogy.

Result on years of teaching experience of the respondents indicated that all thirteen participants had 1-5 years teaching experience. This is a good news since the teaching experiences of these respondents will provide rich information on the challenges they face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy which will contribute significantly towards the study.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

This section provides the experiences of some respondents used for the survey. The interview results aimed at presenting the voice of the participants in the study, and to ensure a thorough assessment of the challenges teachers are facing in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. In the process of presentation, the stories of the participants are interspersed with essential quotations to expound their personal views to the extent as their behavior is concerned. It is worthy of note that only vital responses are provided for the analysis and all names provided in the analysis are participants' pseudonyms and not their real names. The data had been analyzed based on themes (thematic analysis). The analysis was based on the research questions for the study. What characterizes the data is the widespread agreement of the respondents on the issues. There was absolute unanimity in the responses to several of the questions or items, and this degree of unanimity gave much power to the results.

4.3 Research Question 1: What are the views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

Early childhood education serves as the foundation for a child's lifelong learning journey, and the approach to teaching during these formative years profoundly impacts a child's development. In recent years, play-based pedagogy has gained prominence as an effective and holistic method of early childhood education. It is a pedagogical approach that centers on the idea that children learn best through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences.

In the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, where the importance of early childhood education is recognized, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the learning experiences of young children. As I sought to understand the landscape of early childhood education in this region, it is essential to explore the views, perceptions, and insights of the educators who are at the forefront of this transformative process.

This research question sought to explore into the views of teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices. It aims to uncover their beliefs, challenges, successes, and strategies as they navigate the dynamic world of early childhood education in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Participants were interviewed on their views about play and the main theme that emerge from their excerpts was **‘Active learning through play’**.

Theme 1: Active learning through Play

Teachers' views on play-based practice is critically important for the successful implementation of play-based pedagogy in their classroom. It requires teachers to have a deep understanding of play-based pedagogy to provide the appropriate teaching method and technique to facilitate children's learning. In this theme, the researcher aimed to understand teachers' general views about play-based pedagogical

practices in early childhood education in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Below are respondents' views on play-based pedagogy;

One participants mentioned that;

Play-based pedagogy is a teaching approach that allows children to learn through play with an active exploration and creativity. It's about making learning enjoyable and meaningful (Teacher 1)

Another teacher stated that;

Play-based pedagogy is an approach that allows children understand complex concepts through the use of play as a teaching method (Teacher2)

Also, it was stated that;

Play is very necessary when teaching young children. Play-based pedagogy is a teaching method that require teachers to teach with play thereby making the learning child-centered. (Teacher 3)

Again, other participants expressed that;

"I know it's an active teaching method which necessitates teachers to use play to teach. [Teacher 4]

From the aforementioned responses, indicated that PBP is a positive approach which involves Active learning through play.

Also, participants were interviewed about the appropriateness of play-based pedagogy in their classroom and learning, it generated this theme "Active learners' participation".

Sub-theme 1: Active Learners' Participation

Play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood education promotes active participation among learners because it is known that children learn best through play

and so, through the use of this approach that harnesses the inherent playfulness and curiosity of young learners to foster meaningful educational experiences. In this section, the researcher delved into what teachers have observed when implementing the play-based pedagogical practices, their appropriateness in the classroom, and the experiences they have had while implementing this approach.

When respondents were asked “Are play-based pedagogy appropriate in your classroom and learning”?

A respondent stated that,

“Play-based pedagogy is appropriate to use because it fosters children’s social skills like sharing of items, teamwork, and communication. It is making children learn to collaborate and resolve conflicts”

Another teacher mentioned,

“Yes, they are appropriate because that I think is the right thing. For children, you cannot lecture them. They enjoy to play and you know if you enjoy doing something, you do it best so if they enjoy play why would you defuse play in their learning which at the end of the day, help develop their holistic competency”

Also, other respondent stated,

“It is very nice to use because the children already know play and so they participate better when teaching with it. This approach ensures all learners actively participate in the lesson and they enjoy the lesson more. It is appropriate to use”

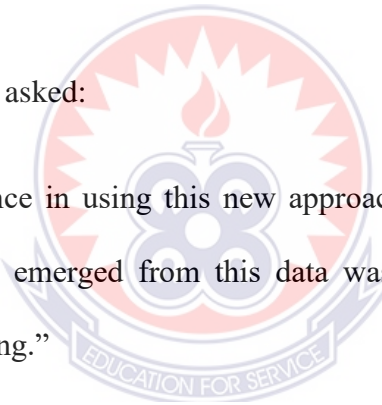
Again, another respondent stated,

“Using this approach has increased learners' participation in class because they see learning as fun and interesting since most of the play activities are repeated over and over for some time which helps also to increase their understanding in a lesson”

From the forgoing, participants expressed that PBP is appropriate in their classroom because it enhances active learner's participation in the classroom and learning. For learner's participation, the respondents discussed the positive impact of play-based pedagogies on student participation. They noted that the approach has led to increased engagement in the classroom, as students find learning enjoyable and interesting. The repetition of play activities is highlighted as a key factor contributing to enhanced comprehension.

Also, participants were asked:

“What is your experience in using this new approach in your classroom in content wise”? The theme that emerged from this data was that “Play-based Pedagogy is interesting but demanding.”



Sub-theme 2: Play-based Pedagogy is interesting but demanding

The respondents expressed their experience in terms of relating it to content, learner participation when teaching using play-based pedagogy. The following are some shared views from the participants on their experience in using this new approach in your classroom in content wise”?

A participant expressed that;

“It makes teaching easy, interactive and fun for both the teacher and the learners. But then, it demands a lot like using adequate TLM's, it is time consuming as well.”

Also, another participant stated that;

“It makes teaching interesting but then, it waste time and its capital expensive especially when you want to use play, or a game or puzzle, it tends to distract

Again, a teacher mentioned that;

“Aside the fact that it ensures active participation among learners, It can distract the whole lesson if you the teacher is unable to control the class. Also, its capital expensive,

For Content wise, the respondents emphasized that Play-based pedagogy is interesting but demanding in delivering content. Participants expressed the positive and negative advantages in teaching with this approach. They highlight the positive impact on teaching, making it easier and more interactive for both teachers and students. Moreover, it was noted that play-based pedagogy can help extend children's attention spans, but it is time consuming, requires or demand to have more play materials which is termed to be capital intensive and distracts the lesson, are some excerpts that EC educators expressed. Content is described as a guide for teachers to effectively teach various subjects, highlighting the versatility of play-based approaches in covering a wide range of topics.

These responses collectively underscore the benefits of play-based pedagogies in early childhood education, emphasizing their appropriateness, their positive influence on teaching and content delivery, and their capacity to enhance student engagement and understanding. These responses provide insights into the views of teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality regarding play-based pedagogical practices. They highlight the challenges and opportunities in terms of resource availability, and its' usefulness to children learning.

4.4 Research Question 2: What material resources are available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

The benefits of play-based activities for children's learning are a critical aspect of early childhood education. This research question sought to explore what material resources are available to teachers when teaching with Play-based pedagogical practices to contribute to children's educational development. From this research question, this theme was emerged limited teaching and learning resources (TLR's).

Theme 2: Limited Teaching and Learning Resources

The availability and variety of play materials and resources are fundamental factors in the successful implementation of play-based pedagogical practices. Early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality may have diverse sets of play materials and resources, and understanding what is available provides insight into the potential richness or limitations of the learning environment. The following are some shared views from the participants.

A participant stated that,

“In my classroom, I have materials such as building blocks, puzzles, and a small library of picture books which I think is not enough”

Another participant said,

“The most common used materials here are building blocks, bottle tops, and playdough but are not adequate for all learners.”

Also, a respondent mentioned,

“I rely on play-dough more often especially when it comes to crafting activities and drawing materials for various activities. However, the variety of resources is limited, which is a challenge”

Again, a participant stated,

“Just as you can see, I have only the drawn image on the wall, which I know is very bad but then I can’t always be using my money to buy them always.

For the commonly used materials, the interviewees stated that they use all the mentioned materials. However, this response lacks specific details regarding the sufficiency of these materials. It sets the stage for a discussion on the condition and sufficiency of these materials.

Furthermore, when participants were asked; *what are the condition of materials (Are they enough to be teaching with?)*. It generated this sub-theme; Insufficient and deteriorating learning resources.

Sub-theme 1: Insufficient and deteriorating learning resources

The condition of play materials and resources can significantly impact their usefulness in facilitating effective play-based pedagogy. This theme explores the state of the materials and whether they are sufficient to meet the needs of the learners.

A participant said,

“The materials are not in good shapes and they are not enough. You sometimes see the learners fighting over these materials.

Another said,

“The condition of our play materials varies; some are quite old and worn, while others are in decent shape. Unfortunately, they are not enough to cater to the number of students I have”

Also, it was stated by a different participant that,

“Some of our materials are damaged, and there’s a clear need for replacements. Adequate resources are vital for creating a stimulating learning environment but we don’t have adequate TLM’s in our class”

Again, a participant mentioned,

“The conditions of our play materials is really bad. Some looks old, and torn out. It’s a challenge to manage these limited resources”

For conditions of the materials, the respondents expressed concerns about the poor condition and insufficiency of educational materials, particularly play materials, in their learning environments. The challenges mentioned include materials being damaged, worn out, not enough to meet the demands of the students, and the resulting impact on creating a stimulating and effective learning environment. The overarching theme highlights the need for attention, improvement, and replenishment of learning resources to enhance the quality of education.

They mention that the materials are not in good shape where some are torn out, old and looks fade on their walls and there are instances where students are unable to bring materials from home due to previous misplacement. This indicates an insufficiency of resources and the potential impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

More so, participants were asked, “How often are these play materials and resources updated or replaced?” This sub-theme was generated from their responses “Lack of Material Updates and Maintenance”.

Sub-Theme 2: Lack of Material Updates and Maintenance.

The usual update with play materials and resources is an important aspect which can damage the dynamic and effective learning environment. This theme delves into how often these updates occur. The following are some shared views on “How often are these play materials and resources updated or replaced?” Some responses included;

A participant said,

“Our play materials haven’t been updated in years. It’s high time they were replaced to provide a more engaging experience for the children”

Another participant said,

“I haven’t received new materials or replacements since I started teaching here”

Again, a participant stated,

“Updates of materials are rare, and I often have to repair damaged materials myself. More regular updates would greatly benefit the learning experience”

Moreover, a participant said,

“Not at all, just look at the image on the wall, it has been here since I came here and even the paintings on the wall, are bad, so it has affected the image drawn on the wall not bringing out the beauty of the

picture out which is bad. You will hear learners say ‘MADAM I CAN’T SEE ANYTHING ON THE WALL’ which tends to distract the class”

From the excerpts above, it is seen that update of materials is infrequent and it sometimes affects the classroom learning and class control. For how often the play materials and resources updated or replaced, the respondents highlight the infrequency of updates or replacements of play materials and resources. They drew attention to the deteriorating condition of classroom decorations and the negative impact it has on the learning environment and the classroom management.

In this analysis, the researcher explore the limitations of materials faced by early childhood education teachers in using play materials for early childhood education. The interview responses shed light on the availability, condition, and frequency of updates for these materials, highlighting the obstacles early childhood education teachers encounter when providing a stimulating learning environment.

These responses collectively emphasize the challenges early childhood education teachers face regarding the availability, condition, and maintenance of play materials in early childhood education. Limited resources and irregular updates can hinder the ability to provide a stimulating and engaging learning environment for young children. Again, these responses illuminate the types of play materials and resources available to teachers in early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, the condition of these resources, and the need for regular updates or replacements. The insights provided underscore the importance of resource management and allocation to support effective play-based pedagogy in this educational context.

4.5 Research Question 3: How trained are teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?

This research question seeks to uncover the trainings teachers have gained with regards to play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. It highlights the structured approach taken to integrate play into the educational framework. When participants were asked, “How trained are teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?” this theme was generated limited/Irregular training workshops.

Theme 3: Irregular training workshops

The trainings teachers receive regarding play-based pedagogical practices is foundational to their ability to effectively implement these approaches in early childhood centers. In the Yilo-Krobo Municipality understanding the training avenues available to early childhood education teachers and whether they are ongoing provides insights into the extent to which teachers are equipped for play-based teaching. Participants were asked, “What training avenues are available for you on the teaching of learners with play-based pedagogies? Are they still ongoing?”

The following were gathered from the participants.

One participant said,

“I have attended two work so far on play-based pedagogy which are the New Curriculum workshop and the regular PLC we have on every Wednesday but attendance is not guaranteed due to various constraints such as; inconsistency of the training workshops, and lack of monitoring”

Another participant mentioned,

“I attended a training program on the new curriculum, few years ago that introduced me to play-based pedagogy. Unfortunately, there haven’t been follow-up opportunities

Another said,

“Some of us have attended workshops on play-based learning, but they are not regular. We need more consistent training to enhance our skills in this area”

A participant also stated that,

“So far, it’s the learning and PLC which we’ve had. But the PLC is still ongoing.

From the above excerpts, it can be seen that most of the EC teachers in the municipality have had limited training workshops which most of them are the New Curriculum training, and the PLC workshop which is ongoing. This highlights the need for more workshops to help equip these teachers in their lesson delivery.

Furthermore, when participants were asked;

“How has the professional development training opportunities influence your teaching”, this theme was generated “Increased creativity and improved teaching practices”

Sub-theme 1: Increased creativity and improved teaching practices

Professional development opportunities and training experiences can significantly influence teachers’ practices in the classroom. This theme delves into the impact of these opportunities on early childhood education teachers’ teaching approaches and their ability to integrate play-based pedagogical practices. When participants’ were asked “How has the professional development training opportunities influence your teaching”, the following were gathered;

First participant stated,

“The PLC training precisely I have attended is yielding a positive impact in my teaching practices. I’ve learned how to create engaging activities and incorporate play into my lessons more effectively”

Another participant said,

“Attending a workshop on play-based pedagogy (the PLC) has opened my eyes to new teaching methods. It is gradually helping me to be creative and responsive to the needs of the learners”

Again, a teacher mentioned,

“The limited training opportunities I’ve attended has been valuable, precisely the PLC but a more comprehensive training is needed to help us better integrate play into our teaching like calling on NGO’s like World vision, Right to Play, Sabre Foundation etc to come train us”

Also, another participant stated,

“PLC which is Professional Learning Community is helping little by little to learn from other teachers on the use of play-based pedagogy”

From the responses, it can be said that the little or limited training opportunities these teachers have, is yielding a positive result on their teaching but then, the need for more training workshop is a necessity.

On the flip side, participants were asked “Have you attended any workshops, seminars or courses that focused on implementing play-based pedagogy?” The sub-theme that generated was inadequate workshops and seminars.

Sub-theme 2: Inadequate Workshops and Seminars

Workshops, seminars, and courses focused on implementing play-based pedagogy can provide teachers with valuable insights and strategies. This theme explored whether teachers have attended such events and its impact. The following were gathered when participants were asked **“Have you attended any workshops, seminars or courses that focused on implementing play-based pedagogy?”** Here are some of the responses;

One participant said,

“I’ve attended a few workshops on play-based learning, which are the PLC, a training on sound blending in a playful manner”

Another also said,

“I’ve had the opportunity to participate in seminars that emphasized play-based approaches but so far it’s the training of the new curriculum, Learning and PLC which I think it’s inadequate for me as an early childhood educator”

Again, a participant stated,

“I haven’t attended any workshops or courses focused on play-based pedagogy just the recent PLC we are having on every Wednesdays.

From the responses, it can be said that most of these EC teachers have limited training opportunities. Hence the need for more training opportunities.

Moving forward, participant were again asked, “How do you think your training has prepared you to effectively implement play-based pedagogical practices? and this was the theme that was generated “Inadequate preparedness of teachers”.

Sub-theme 3: Inadequate Preparedness of Teachers

Teachers' perceived inadequate preparedness as a crucial aspect of unsuccessful implementation. This sub-theme explores how teachers perceive their training in preparing them effectively but not satisfactory enough to implement a successful play-based pedagogical practices as expected.

The following were accrued from the participants when asked "How do you think your training has prepared you to effectively implement play-based pedagogical practices"

A participant stated,

"I think I have not received much training and personally need more training to equip me better with my teaching"

Another teacher also mentioned that,

"I think I have gotten the foundation but there's still a lot to learn about play-based pedagogy. Ongoing training and support are necessary to fully prepare early childhood education teachers"

Also, another participant stated,

"I feel somehow prepared, because I am able to teach for learners to understand and participant in the lesson but there is a gap in my understanding and implementation of the approach. More training would definitely help"

From the comments so far, it is seen that most of these teachers are not much prepared when it comes to teaching with play-based pedagogy due to insufficient training workshops and also limited materials. It highlights the importance of these events such as gathering of teachers at PLC time, facilitating learning, and sharing ideas

about teaching with modern technology and play in the 21st century classroom, however it's insufficient to equip these teachers well.

These responses collectively illustrate the significant impact of professional development, particularly through PLCs and other previous workshops, on equipping early childhood education teachers with the skills, methodologies, and creativity required to effectively implement play-based pedagogical practices. The training plays a pivotal role in adapting teaching approaches to modern educational needs. Also, the responses offer a comprehensive overview of teachers' training levels and their experiences with play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. It highlights the need for a more and ongoing training, more professional development opportunities and gaining training assistance from NGO's such as Sabre Foundation, Right to Play Ghana, World vision etc. to liaise with the GES and the Ministry of Education to enhance early childhood education teachers' abilities to effectively integrate play-based approaches into their teaching methods and create more Teaching and Learning Resources. This is a good news as teachers who have a strong foundation in Early childhood education and knows the relevance of play can call for the need for more professional training and workshops to help equip them in their teaching seeing their willingness and knowledge on play-based pedagogy and knowing its' impact it has on children learning.

4.6 Research Question 4: What strategies are available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?

This research question sought to explore the strategies available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers.

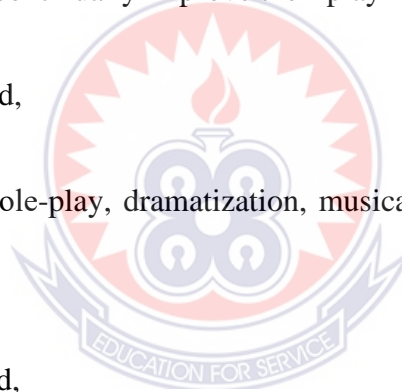
When participants were asked, “What strategies are available to empower educators to continually improve their play-based teaching methods? The theme generated was, active and experiential teaching strategies.

Theme 4: Active and Experiential Teaching Strategies

In this section, the researcher explore how teachers in early childhood centers within the Yilo-Krobo District currently incorporate play-based pedagogy into their teaching practices. Incorporating play based activities as strategies in teaching at the early childhood centers is critically important for teaching young children. Here are some of the responses from participants when asked “What strategies are available to empower educators to continually improve their play-based teaching methods”:

A participant mentioned,

“I mostly use role-play, dramatization, musical chair etc. to teach depending on the topic.



Another participant said,

“The common strategies I use are role-play, outdoor games, pick and acts etc which makes the class lively.”

Also, a teacher stated,

“I use dramatization, word card, role-play, musical chair to teach but it all depends on the topic”

From these responses, it can be seen that teacher uses more play-based activities as teaching strategies.

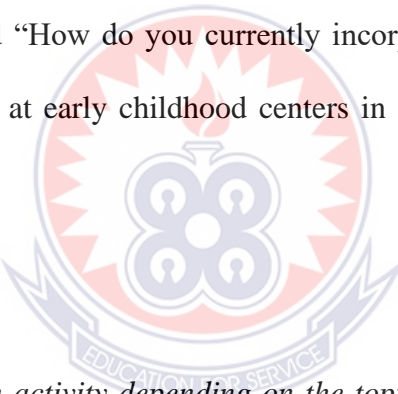
As the researcher explore the responses from educators, valuable insights into the strategies that not only elevate the quality of play-based pedagogy but also enrich the learning experiences of young children in this region was seen. These strategies are integral to fostering a stimulating and nurturing educational environment that lays a solid foundation for a lifetime of learning and growth.

Moreover, participants were finally asked “How do you currently incorporate play-based pedagogy in your teaching practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?” this sub-theme was developed “Topic-Driven Play-based Instruction”.

Sub-theme 1: Topic-Driven Play-based Instruction

Participants were asked “How do you currently incorporate play-based pedagogy in your teaching practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?” here are some of the responses;

A participant said,



"I mostly use an activity depending on the topic I may be teaching; it will determine if I'm to use it or not. But then, the common ones I mostly use are role-play, dramatization, singing songs and rhymes, etc., which I think are also play-based activities."

Another participant said,

"Depending on the topic which informs me if to use play-based approach or not. For instance, if I am teaching a topic like "ALL AROUND ME", I will use a nature walk activity which is also a play-

based activity and so, I think the topic do help me to know if to use play-activity in my teaching of not.”

Again, a participant stated,

“The topic guide me to choose the right play activities for my teaching like we are treating a topic on “MY FAMILY”, I can employ song as a play activity where learners will sing a song called “Daddy finger where are you” or I can employ role-play activity where learners will act roles like their parent etc”

From the excerpts, it can be seen that the topic is a key factor in using/creating the appropriate play-based activities. Hence, topic de play activities to use.

In addition, participants were asked “What activities do you engage children in, regarding play-based learning?” the sub-theme which was generated was “Playful engagement”.

Sub-theme 2: Playful Engagements

The strategies employed by teachers to engage children in play-based learning activities are essential for effective pedagogical practices in early childhood centers. In the Yilo-Krobo Municipality understanding the nature of these activities and how they are implemented provides valuable insights into the strategies teachers employ to promote learning through play.

Participants were asked “What activities do you engage children in, regarding play-based learning?” The following were accrued from the participants.

A participant said,

“I engage children in various activities such as building with blocks, exploring nature in our outdoor area, and storytelling sessions. These

activities encourage creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction”

Another one mentioned,

“Hands-on activities like painting, playing with clay, and interactive games help children develop fine motor skills and express their creativity. These activities make learning enjoyable and engaging”

Again, one participant also said,

“I integrate play into our lessons through activities like role-play, where children take on different roles to understand real-life situations better. This method enhances their communication and empathy skills”

Also, it was stated by a participant that,

“I engage them in dramatization, role-play, songs and rhymes, etc., but there are a lot, so the topic will inform you on the type of activity to engage the learners in.”

From the excerpts, it can be seen that teachers engages learners in playful activities which results in positive outcome on their learning.

Again, participants were asked, how “How do you plan and organize play-based activities to ensure they align with the curriculum and learning objectives”, and it generated our next sub-theme which is Adaptive instructional design.

Sub-theme 3: Adaptive Instructional Design

With this theme (Adaptive Instructional Design), the participants were asked “How do you plan and organize play-based activities to ensure they align with the curriculum and learning objectives?” Here are some of the responses;

A participant stated,

"I take into consideration, the age and class of the learners then base on these, I select a theme break it down and create the right activities for it."

Another also said,

"I first check the class of the learners and select the theme/topic for discussion and get the right activities that correspond to it"

Again, a different participant mentioned that,

"The particular class guide me to select the theme to be taught and base on that, I create the appropriate activities that are in-line with it"

From the excerpts above, it can be seen that teachers plan and organize play-based activities through adaptive instructional design whereby the teacher emphasizes the importance of tailoring their teaching approach to the specific characteristics and needs of the learners in a given class. This involves considering factors like age, class, and the unique dynamics of the class itself, and then customizing the chosen theme or topic along with corresponding activities to ensure a more effective and personalized learning experience.

Moving forward, participants were asked “How do you assess and evaluate children's learning outcomes and progress within a play-based approach?” and it generated this theme; “Play-based formative Assessment”

Sub-theme 4: Play-based Formative Assessment

Assessing and evaluating children's learning outcomes within a play-based approach is essential for monitoring progress. This theme explores how teachers assess and evaluate children's learning within a play-based context. When participants were asked, "How do you assess and evaluate children's learning outcomes and progress within a play-based approach" the following ensued from the participants.

One participant said,

"I use a combination of informal observations and documentation to assess learning. Watching children engage in play-based activities helps us understand their strengths and areas for improvement. So as they play, I ask learners to perform an activity for me to see and through that I assess the using remarks like good, well done, excellent etc."

Another participant also said,

"I maintain portfolios where I collect samples of children's work, photographs, and notes on their progress."

Also, it was mentioned again that,

"I do it by allowing them to perform an activity so if they are able to, then that will be their assessment and inform me whether they have understood the lesson or not"

A participants also said,

"I assess the learners through the question and answers technique, also allowing them to perform an activity to determine if they understood what was taught."

These responses shed light on the strategies employed by teachers in the Yilo-Krobo District to improve play-based pedagogical practices. It highlights the importance of

hands on activities, their benefits for children's learning, and the thoughtful planning, organization, assessment, and evaluation processes that underpin effective play-based education.

4.7 Discussion

Views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality

The views of teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality regarding play-based pedagogical practices are largely positive with some aspects of negativity. Teachers recognize the significant benefits of play-based pedagogy for teaching young children at the early childhood centers also as an approach which is highly time consuming. Many views' play as an effective and enjoyable way for children to acquire essential skills and knowledge while others sight it as a time consuming approach. They appreciated the fact that play-based approaches foster creativity, problem-solving abilities, social skills, a love for learning and promoted active learner participation in the classrooms.

However, there are challenges in fully implementing play-based practices. Some teachers may face resistance from parents and caregivers who have traditional expectations of education. They see it as they are wasting their monies and teachers are not teaching their children anything but engaging them in play. The activities involved in one theme consumes lots of time to finish teaching one theme. Balancing play with curriculum requirements and standardized testing can also be a challenge.

The findings align with existing research that highlights the positive impact of play-based learning on early childhood development. Scholars like Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1962) have emphasized the role of play in cognitive and social development,

and contemporary research like Froebel, Maria Montessori etc. continues to support the value of play-based pedagogies and its' importance in early childhood education.

According to the study by Bodrova and Leong (2017), teachers' positive views of play-based practices are in line with research that highlights the critical role of play in promoting the development of executive functions in young children. These functions include skills like self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and working memory, which are crucial for academic success.

A study by Lynch (2015), emphasize that teachers feel pressured which compelled them to prioritize formal instruction and assessment over play-based learning experiences are stranded in the research that shows teacher feels the play-based pedagogy is a demanding approach to use which is also preventing some teachers from using this approach.

A study by Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) emphasizes that teachers' positive views of play-based pedagogy are grounded in research that shows the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of play for young children. The study underscores that play-based practices align with the developmental needs of early learners, fostering creativity, problem-solving, and social skills.

Material resources available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality

Early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality have inadequate varying levels of material resources for play-based pedagogical practices. Common resources include building blocks, puzzles, bottle tops, straws, pictures and books. These resources though not enough serve as valuable tools for facilitating hands-on learning and

creativity among young learners. However, the condition of these materials varies, with some being old and worn. There is a notable need for more resources to support play-based learning, especially given the challenges posed by large class sizes. Inadequate resources can limit the diversity of play activities and may hinder teachers' ability to provide an enriched learning environment.

These findings align with research highlighting the importance of access to quality play materials and resources in early childhood education. Scholars like Bodrova and Leong (2017) emphasize that well-maintained and diverse materials can significantly enhance the effectiveness of play-based pedagogical practices. A study by Stacey and Sumion (2016), emphasizes play-based pedagogy requires a wide range of materials and resources to support children's learning and development.

The work of Bergen (2002) highlights the importance of well-maintained and diverse play materials and resources. The study emphasizes that access to high-quality materials, such as building blocks and art supplies, significantly enhances the effectiveness of play-based pedagogical practices by providing opportunities for hands-on learning and creativity. A study by Sarama and Clements (2018) emphasizes that access to a wide range of play materials, including those related to mathematics and science, can significantly contribute to children's conceptual understanding and problem-solving skill. Again, a study by Hobson and Healy (2011), underscores that the availability of a range of materials and resources was associated with increased engagement and creativity in play-based activities. It reinforces the importance of well-maintained resources in supporting play-based learning.

How trained teachers are regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District

Teachers in Yilo-Krobo District have received limited training in play-based pedagogy. While play-based approaches are recognized as beneficial, the findings reveal that teachers' training in this area has been rather limited during their teacher education. Some teachers have had the opportunity to attend workshops, seminars, or courses related to play-based pedagogy. These training experiences have positively influenced their teaching practices, making them creative to some extent, child-centered, and responsive to students' needs.

However, there is a consensus among teachers that more comprehensive and ongoing training is needed to better prepare early childhood education teachers for the effective implementation of play-based approaches. This aligns with research that underscores the importance of professional development in early childhood education, particularly in areas such as play-based learning, which requires specialized knowledge and skills.

The research of Gartrell (2021) underscores that teacher training is a critical factor in implementing play-based pedagogy effectively. The study emphasizes that training programs should focus on helping teachers understand the theoretical foundations of play-based learning and provide practical strategies for implementation.

The research of Neuman and Roskos (2017) underscores the importance of professional development in early childhood education. The study emphasizes that ongoing training and support are essential for equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills required for effective implementation of play-based pedagogy. It highlights

the positive impact of training on teachers' readiness to implement play-based approaches.

Strategies available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District

The strategies available to teachers in Yilo-Krobo District to enhance play-based pedagogical practices include active and experiential teaching strategies (role-play, dramatization, etc.), adaptive instructional design, playful engagements, and assessing and evaluating children learning outcomes during play-based activities. Teachers mentioned that they start by considering class and age of the learners and then select the theme to be studied, then design play-based activities to align with the theme. Topic-driven play-based instruction where respondents expressed that the topic is a key factor in selecting an appropriate play-based activity. Playful engagement such as role play, dramatization, musical chairs, nature walk etc. was another strategies teacher's use in teaching young children at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality

Furthermore, teachers assess and evaluate children's learning outcomes using play-based Formative Assessment where learners are assessed in the course of lesson using a combination of informal observations, documentation, and portfolios. These strategies help teachers track children's progress and tailor support when necessary. These strategies are consistent with best practices in early childhood education, emphasizing the importance of adaptive instructional design alignment with curriculum goals, and authentic assessment methods within play-based pedagogical practices. Research supports these approaches, highlighting their effectiveness in optimizing children's learning experiences through play.

The study by Copple and Bredekamp (2009) emphasizes the significance of intentional planning and alignment with curriculum objectives in play-based pedagogy. It underscores that systematic planning ensures that play activities become purposeful and educational experiences, enhancing children's learning outcomes. The study also highlights the effectiveness of intentional planning in connecting play with specific curriculum content.

The work of Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2019) highlights the significance of using authentic assessment methods, such as observations and portfolios, in play-based pedagogy. These methods allow teachers to gain a deeper understanding of children's development and provide targeted support, aligning with the strategies mentioned by teachers in Yilo-Krobo District.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of the summary of the study, key findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

This chapter serves as a pivotal point of reflection, synthesis, and action. It encapsulates the essence of our research findings, derives meaningful conclusions, and lays out actionable recommendations aimed at advancing early childhood education in this region.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges teachers face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The specific objectives of the study were to find out:

1. Views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
2. Material resources available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
3. How trained teachers are regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.
4. Strategies available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

Literature was reviewed based on the objectives. It was done in three sections, the theoretical review, conceptual review, and the review of empirical studies. The

theoretical, conceptual and the empirical reviews were combined to provide a strong framework (foundation) and good source of principles to guide the study. The literature reviewed has also helped in filling the gaps in previous studies relating to the study. The study was anchored on the interpretivist paradigm, motivated by the qualitative approach and directed by the qualitative case study design. Ethical issues governing the conduct of qualitative research such as anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were considered. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide and analysed using thematic analysis.

5.2 Key Findings

1. Teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality hold positive views of play-based pedagogical practices. They perceived play-based learning as beneficial for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Notwithstanding the positive views they share about play-based pedagogy (PBP), there were some negative views and challenges they held about PBP which included; the approach being time consuming, availability of limited play resources and materials, packed content and difficulty in balancing play with curriculum requirements.
2. The interviewee respondents indicated that there is insufficient teaching and learning play materials in the classroom, which hinders the variety of activities and experiences that can be offered to young learners. This limitation affects the diversity of teaching methods and the comprehensiveness of the curriculum. Also, they added that the condition of existing play materials is reported as subpar. This deteriorating condition of materials sometimes diminish their effectiveness in engaging students and supporting learning experiences. Damaged or worn-out materials do not provide the desired

educational benefits which tends to distract the class. Again, the respondents highlighted difficulties in securing materials from students' homes due to concerns about misplacement.

3. Teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality have received limited/ irregular training in play-based pedagogy during their in-service period. Some have attended few workshops and seminars related to play-based learning, which has positively influenced their teaching practices and encouraging them to incorporate hands-on and interactive activities in their classrooms. Some teachers express the need for more frequent and comprehensive training opportunities and seeking supports from NGO's like Sabre, 'Right-to-Play', World-vision etc. to deepen their understanding of play-based pedagogy and facilitate its' implementation in their classroom teaching. Teachers expressed their consent for the need of continuous monitoring and evaluation of the training they are having and its impact on teaching.
4. Strategies available to teachers included Active and experiential teaching strategies, adaptive instructional design, Topic-driven play-based instruction, and diverse playful engagement like role-play, dramatization etc. Peer learning and collaboration among teachers contribute significantly to the improvement of play-based teaching methods. Authentic assessment methods like observations and portfolios are used to track children's progress. Effective curriculum integration is essential to ensure that play-based activities align with learning objectives and curriculum requirements.

5.3 Limitations

1. Difficulty in scheduling interview date and time with participants. This was because teachers had different busy schedules.

2. The sample size was small to limit the generalizability of the findings.

Recruiting a sufficient number of participants might be challenging, especially in specific geographical areas or educational settings.

5.4 Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion are drawn:

The views of teachers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality overwhelmingly endorse the value of play-based pedagogical practices. With teachers having such positive views about play-based pedagogy and learning as a powerful tool for teaching young children, will help improve their teaching skills. This positive perspective on play-based approaches aligns with educational research, reinforcing the importance of integrating play into early childhood education. The negative views calls for urgent attention to help ensure a full practice and acceptance of the pedagogy.

The limited teaching and learning play material resources for play-based learning highlight the need for attention and investment especially in early childhood centers. While there is a limited commendable array of resources, the maintenance and the acquisition of additional ones, especially to accommodate larger class sizes, are essential. The need to ensure a consistent supply of high-quality resources is vital for providing enriching play experiences aligned with educational objectives.

The importance of ongoing professional development for teachers is a key activist for effective lesson delivery among teachers. There is a collective call for more comprehensive and continuous training workshops and the urgent call for support from NGO's like Sabre foundation, Right to play Ghana and World vision to help train teachers on the use of play and the creation of play-materials to facilitate

teaching. Prioritizing professional development is pivotal in ensuring that teachers are well-prepared to create meaningful learning experiences for young children.

As teachers employ Active and Experiential Teaching Strategies, it is aligned with the best practices in early childhood education. These strategies ensure that play-based activities are purposefully designed to meet educational objectives and that children's progress is systematically tracked. Embracing these strategies enhances the quality and effectiveness of play-based pedagogical practices. Also, engaging children in playful learning activities will result in a positive and improved learning outcomes and not necessarily using pencil and paper test to assess them rather, using informal formative assessment while lesson is in session.

In effect, the conclusions reflect the key findings and insights derived from the researchers' investigation into play-based pedagogical practices. The study highlights the importance of recognizing the value of play-based education, ensuring access to adequate material resources, prioritizing professional development, and embracing active and experiential teaching strategies and using play-based formative assessment. By addressing these aspects, it can enhance early childhood education in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality and providing a strong foundation for children's educational journeys and fostering a lifelong love of learning.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Based on the finding on positive views of teachers regarding play-based pedagogy, it is crucial to engage in advocacy efforts and awareness campaigns

within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. These initiatives should target parents, caregivers, and the community to promote understanding and acceptance of play-based approaches. Education stakeholders should communicate the numerous cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of play-based learning.

2. To address the challenges associated with material resources, educational authorities in the region should prioritize resource allocation for early childhood centers and encourage teachers to improvise more play materials. Resources and support systems should be put in place to assist teachers in the implementation of play-based pedagogy. This can include access to materials, and support from other NGO's and the government officials. Regular maintenance and replacement of play materials should be ensured. Collaborations with local businesses and community organizations can also be explored to secure donations and support for these resources. Parents should be talked to support schools with material resources when the need arises.
3. To enhance teachers' capacity in implementing play-based pedagogical practices, educational directorate and policymakers should provide comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on play-based approaches. These programs should offer both theoretical and practical in-service training, including classroom observations and mentoring opportunities. Additionally, ongoing professional development should be a mandatory component of teacher training. Furthermore, the government should collaborate with other NGO's like Sabre foundation, Right to play, World vision, Differentiated plus etc. to help train teachers in the municipality.
4. The Yilo-Krobo Municipality educational directorate in collaboration the school heads should encourage teachers to use more effective play-based

strategies in their teaching. Creating learning networks among early childhood education teachers within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality can provide a platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and peer support. These communities can facilitate the exchange of best practices, resources, and strategies related to play-based pedagogy.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the findings of the study on challenges teachers face in the implementation of Play-based Pedagogy at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, there are several areas that could be explored further to enhance Play-based Pedagogy in Ghana.

1. A longitudinal study could be conducted to assess the long-term effects of play-based pedagogy on children's academic, social, and emotional development. This study could follow a cohort of students who have experienced play-based education through their early years and track their progress as they advance through primary and secondary education. By examining the sustained benefits of play-based learning, researchers can provide valuable insights into its long-term impact on academic achievement and life outcomes.
2. A qualitative study could focus on understanding parental perspectives and involvement in play-based education. This research could explore parents' beliefs, attitudes, and expectations regarding early childhood education, particularly their views on play-based approaches. Additionally, the study could investigate the ways in which parents engage with and support their children's play-based learning at home. By gaining insights into parental

perspectives and practices, early childhood education teachers and policymakers can develop strategies to enhance parental engagement in early childhood education.

These suggestions for further studies can expand the knowledge base on play-based pedagogy, its long-term effects, cross-cultural applicability, and the role of parents in supporting such approaches. Conducting these studies can contribute to the ongoing improvement of early childhood education practices, not only in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality and Yilo-Krobo District but also in a broader educational context.



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APPENDIX A

Introductory Letter from GES

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

(E-mail: yilokrobomunicipal@ges.gov.gh / yilokroboseducation@gmail.com)

In case of reply, the number and date of this letter should be given.



Republic of Ghana

Municipal Education Office
Yilo Krobo Municipal
P. O. Box 71
Somanya

Ref No: GES/ET/330

7th September, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I write to introduce to you **Ms. Priscilla Amoako Mensah**, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) student at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba.

She is a final year student who is to embark on her thesis on the topic: "Challenges Teachers' face in the implementation of Play-based Pedagogy at Early Childhood



FES/DECE/L1

August 2, 2023

The Director
Ghana Education Service
Yilo-Krobo Municipality

Dear Sir/Madam,

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I kindly write to introduce to you Ms. Priscilla Amoako Mensah with index number: 220010666 who is a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) student at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba. She is in her final year and has to embark on her thesis on the topic: "Challenges Teachers' face in the implementation of Play-based Pedagogy at Early Childhood Centres in Yilo-Krobo Municipality".

Ms. Amoako Mensah is to collect data for her thesis, and I would be most grateful if she could be given the needed assistance.

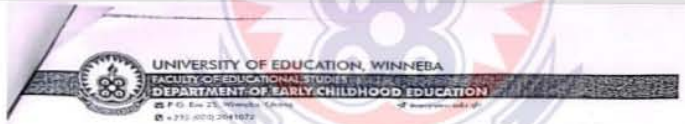
Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

DR. MICHAEL SUBBEY
AG. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT



Scanned with CamScanner



INTRODUCTORY LETTER REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

Section A

Name of Student: Priscilla Amoako Mensah
Index Number: 220010666
Contact No.: 0241261999 Year of Entry (Admission) 2022
Thesis Topic: Challenges Teachers' face in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at Early Childhood Centres in Yilo-Krobo Municipality
GES Address of Research Area: Yilo-Krobo Ghana Education Service Unit
Signature: [Signature] Date: 2/08/2023

Section B

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Michael Subbey
Contact No.: 0244067445
Confirmation of:
1. Readiness of Chapter 1-3: Fully written and ready to do
2. Inspection and Validation of data collection instruments: The instruments have been checked and validated for data collection
Signature: [Signature] Date: 02/08/2023



APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for Early Childhood Teachers (KG1 –P3)

Professional Qualification: _____

Years of Teaching Experience:

Date:

_____ **Time** _____

Contact

Address:

SECTION A

Research Question 1: What are the views of teachers about play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

What is your understanding of play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood education?

Prompts

- a. Are play-based pedagogies appropriate to your classroom and learning?
- b. i. What is your experience in using this new approach in the classroom?
ii. Your experience with this approach in content wise?

SECTION B

Research Question 2: What material resources are available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

Which material resources do you use in delivering play-based pedagogical practices in your classroom?

Prompts

- a. What are the conditions of the materials? Are they enough to be used for teaching?
- b. How often are these play materials and resources updated or replaced?

SECTION C

Research Question 3: How trained are teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?

What training do you have regarding the use of play-based pedagogy in teaching children at early childhood centers?

Prompts

- a. What training avenues are available for you on the teaching of learners with play-based pedagogies? Are they still ongoing?
- b. What professional development opportunities or training have you received related to play-based pedagogy, and how has it influenced your teaching practices?
- c. How do you think your training has prepared you to effectively implement play-based pedagogical practices?

SECTION D

Research Question 4: What strategies are available for teachers to improve upon play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?

How do you currently incorporate play-based pedagogy in your teaching practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo District?

Prompts

- a. What activities do you engage children in, regarding play-based learning?
- b. How are these activities mentioned in (a) helpful to children's learning?

- c. How do you plan and organize play-based activities to ensure they align with the curriculum and learning objectives?
- d. How do you assess and evaluate children's learning outcomes and progress within a play-based approach?

