

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**PLAY-BASED LEARNING IN EARLY GRADE LEARNERS IN THE
SISSALA WEST DISTRICT OF THE UPPER WEST REGION, GHANA**



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SISSALA WEST DISTRICT OF THE UPPER WEST REGION, GHANA**

NURUDEEN ABDUL-MUMIN



**A Dissertation in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
Faculty of Educational Studies, submitted to the school of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment**

**of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
(Early Childhood Education)
In the University of Education, Winneba**

NOVEMBER, 2023

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Nurudeen Abdul-Mumin declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university.

Date

Signature

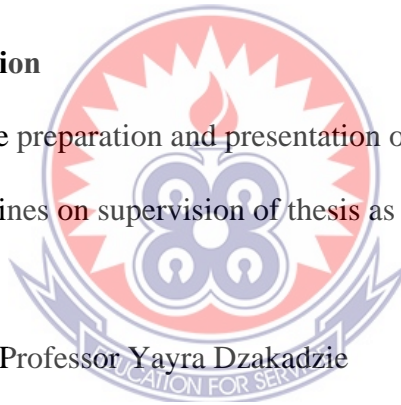
Supervisor's Declaration

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

Name of Supervisor: Professor Yayra Dzakadzie

Signature:.....

Date:.....



DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my lovely and supportive family.



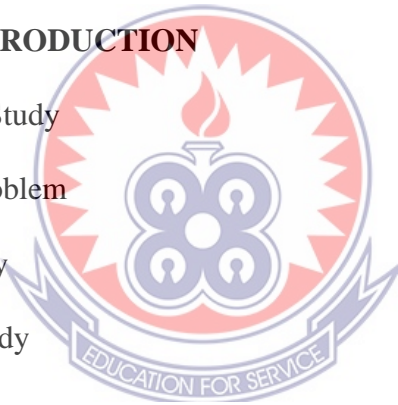
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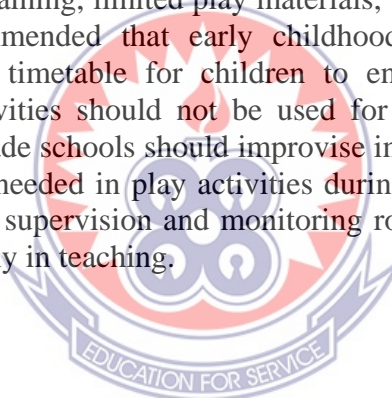
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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the use of play-based learning in early grade centres in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to evaluate play-based activities teachers, engage early learners in during instruction, head teachers, support in the use of play in instruction and the barriers of implementing play in instruction. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Thus, questionnaires and interview guides were used as data collection instruments. A simple random sampling and purposive sampling method was adopted in selecting teachers, early childhood education centres and headteachers respectively. A sample size of 125 teachers and 10 head teachers were selected for the study. The data obtained were statistically analyzed mean/standard deviation. The findings revealed that head teachers in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, support teachers in the use of play in teaching early grade learners by providing play materials, supervision of teachers, training and education of teachers as well as motivation of teachers. Again, it was found that play activities employed by teachers in the use of play in instruction included integration of games and songs in the classroom learning activities and engaging children in outdoor play activities. However, it was found that some challenges that limit teachers in the use of play in their teaching processes are; inadequate in-service training, limited play materials, unavailability of play space and centres. It was recommended that early childhood centres should be allocated sufficient time in the timetable for children to engage in play activities. Time allocated for play activities should not be used for teaching other subjects. Also, teachers in the early grade schools should improvise in making available some play or instructional materials needed in play activities during instruction and head teachers should strengthen their supervision and monitoring roles to motivate teachers to use play activities effectively in teaching.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

The early years of human life provide a unique opportunity for social and cognitive investment, but at the same time, this is the most vulnerable period for all forms of stunting in development if holistic development is not nurtured (World Health Organization, 2018). Froebel (2017) writing on children's play contends that play is not only the children's natural occupation before constraints and formal schooling takes over but it also serves as a major means by which children use to communicate with themselves and with the world around them. Children's play and teachers' involvement in play activities have received recognition and attention from philosophers and educationists for centuries (Aikem, 2013).

Early childhood education plays a significant and pivotal role in the lives of young children and there is consistent empirical evidence that high-quality early childhood education programmes can contribute to children's short-term and long-term gains in cognitive, language and socio-emotional development (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2014; Bredekamp & Copple, 2017; Schweinhart & Weikart, 2016; Sylva & Pugh, 2015).


Play activities are essential in every teaching and learning process at the pre-school level. Research gives ample evidence that children, who engage in play benefit in areas such as developing social interactions, exposure to social interaction and abstract thought (Bodrova & Leong, 2013). Vygotsky (1996) affirms that play has a purpose. That purpose is to allow children to form connections between their actions and realizations, and the objects to which they give significant meaning. Play is a

form of activity that may be encouraged through emerging social interaction and helps children give meaning to events that they experience in their daily lives as they grow. Play facilitates children's ability to improve and acquire social interaction schemes and language skills, such as labelling through abstract thought, role assignment, developing conversation skills, and imaginative story-telling. Imaginative and make-believe play are concepts that develop gradually as children grow (Bodrova & Leong, 2013).

It is expected that early childhood education in Ghana focuses on learning through play, which Jean Piaget posits meet the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of children (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018). Teachers must promote children's development through play through various types of play activities on daily basis. The integration of play in teaching pre-school children should be guided by creating a play-based learning environment which includes providing a safe space, correct supervision and culturally aware trained teachers who are knowledgeable about early year's foundation (Tamakloe, Atta & Amedahe, 2005).

Ghana, like many other countries, faces challenges in providing quality education, especially in rural and remote areas. The Sissala West District, located in the Upper West Region, is characterized by limited educational resources, infrastructure deficiencies, and socio-economic constraints. According to Asante and Osei-Tutu (2020), despite efforts to improve educational outcomes, there remains a gap in engaging young learners effectively, particularly in the foundational years of schooling. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning often overlook the importance of play in child development, leading to rote memorization and passive learning experiences (Kwofie, 2018).

The rationale for investigating play-based learning in the context of the Sissala West District stems from the need to enhance educational practices and outcomes for early grade learners. By understanding the potential benefits of play-based methods, educators and policymakers can tailor instructional practices to better meet the diverse needs of young children in the district. While there is a growing body of research supporting the efficacy of play-based learning in early childhood education, there is limited empirical evidence specific to the Sissala West District. This study seeks to address this research gap by investigating the implementation of play-based approaches in early grade classrooms within the district and examining their impact on children's learning outcomes, engagement, and socio-emotional development Karia, E. (2014).



The play-based activities most seen in schools include physical, dramatic, sensory, nature, music and art, and age-appropriate play. Children need the various types of play in order to support and facilitate meaningful learning opportunities as they develop language, motor, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities. Through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social welfare, the government ensured that pre-school teachers/caregivers acquired necessary skills, information and knowledge on how pre-primary school children should actively learn. Since then emphasis has been put on use of Child-Centered Teaching Methods (CCTMs) like the use of play as a teaching approach in both indoor and outdoor teaching and learning activities in schools (URT, 2008).

The development of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ghana has undergone a number of major changes over the years. The broad goal of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy in Ghana is to promote the

survival, growth and development of all children aged zero to eight years, to ensure an improved standard of living and enhance the quality of life for families in Ghana (ECCD, 2002; Nyarko & Addo, 2013) and the emphasis of play in achieving the goals of ECCE had not been overemphasized in each ECCE policy. The activities in the earliest childcare facilities consisted mainly of games, singing, and storytelling as well as some alphabet and number activities coupled with traditional play. Over the years, the Ghanaian ECCE curriculum has evolved, and as such, some curriculum areas have been renamed (for example, literacy or language, numeracy) and others incorporated (for example, health, nutrition and safety, psychosocial skills, creative activities) (Nyarko & Addo, 2013). Despite the stated effort by the government, early childhood educators are facing curricula and pedagogical challenges. There is discrepancy between what the program purport to offer to children and what is actually offered at the pre-schools and day care centers. The stated irregularity has necessitated this study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Play historically has had an important and unquestioned place in children's development and continues to be relevant in contemporary early childhood educational practices. Play over the years has been identified as developmentally appropriate for teaching in early childhood settings (NAEYC, 2014). It is very likely that the diversity in the way play is conceptualized influences the position it is accorded in the school context. Some studies in Ghana, demonstrates how early childhood educators feel about using play as an instrument of instruction at the early childhood level (Boakye, 2021; Abdulai, 2014; Frimpong, 2021). However, they also suggested roles of early childhood head teachers and teachers in the use of play in instruction. Nevertheless, there are some studies in Turkish context, which exhibits

similar results (Tuğrul, Aslan, Ertürk, and Altınkaynak ,2014). It is also stated that they could not benefit from play in teaching process (Tuğrul et al., 2014). Despite the growing body of research supporting the efficacy of play-based learning in early childhood education globally, there is limited empirical evidence specific to the Sissala West District. As emphasized by Abu and Kyeremeh (2021), there is a need to bridge this research gap by investigating the implementation of play-based approaches in early grade classrooms within the district and examining their impact on children's learning outcomes, engagement, and socio-emotional development

These notwithstanding, there are growing concerns on how play is used by teachers in the classroom Genishi et al (2001), the complexities associated with the use of play and how to set the environment to reflect a “play friendly” environment (Guffin and Wilson, 2003), Interestingly with Ghana, little is known about the use of play-based learning in early grade learners. Studies have revealed that learning occurs naturally even though most teachers do not use real objects (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2012). Generally, when it comes to Ghana, there are some perceptions that play hovers around chaos and harmony. Therefore, in the current study, the use of play-based learning in early grade learners will be investigated along with their views toward free play in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region in Ghana.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the use of play-based centres in early grade centers in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To evaluate play-based activities teachers engage early learners in during instruction in the Sissala West District.
- ii. To examine how headteachers support teachers in the use of play in instruction in the Sissala West District.
- iii. To investigate the barriers teachers face during the implementation of play in instructions in the Sissala West District.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What play-based activities do teachers engage early learners in during instruction in the Sissala West District?
- ii. How do headteachers support teachers in the use of play in instruction in the Sissala West Districts?
- iii. What are the barriers teachers face during the implementation of play in instructions in the Sissala West District?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides an opportunity for school heads, teachers and learners in the selected schools to see the need to involve play as an integral aspect of teaching and learning in early childhood education centres. The idea of children's social play is an important aspect of learning in early childhood education. Through both solitary play and social play, children develop self-control, problem-solving strategies, language fluency in communication and cooperation, as well as an understanding of symbolic representation and social behaviour. This study provides learners in the selected

schools the chance of enhancing their creativity and imagination through play. As children play, they learn how to get along with others, communicate with peers and how solve problems.

This research will equip the Government of Ghana, the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Developers and other stakeholders with relevant information on the level of play use in instruction at the Sissala West District. They will be provided with information on the challenges faced by head teachers and teachers in their quest to ensure play use in instruction. Also, the finding of this study will be a source of reference material for teachers, students, stakeholders and the general public in any other study which would be related to this study.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study specifically focuses on the Sissala West District within the Upper West Region of Ghana. While this geographic delimitation provides a localized context for the research, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to other districts or regions with different socio-economic, cultural, and educational characteristics. The research is delimited to early grade learners, typically encompassing kindergarten to primary grades within the district. By narrowing the focus to this specific age group, the study aims to explore the unique challenges and opportunities associated with implementing play-based learning in the foundational years of formal education. The study is delimited to formal educational settings, such as public schools, within the Sissala West District. While informal learning environments, such as community-based initiatives or home-based education, may also incorporate play-based approaches, they are not within the scope of this research. The study delimits its focus to play-based learning approaches, which encompass a range of pedagogical methods that integrate play and educational objectives. While other forms of learning, such as

teacher-centered instruction or rote memorization, may coexist within the educational landscape, they are not the primary focus of this research.

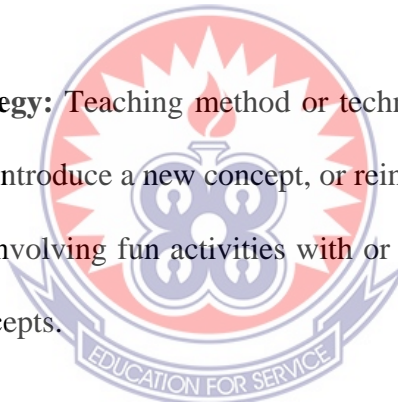
1.7 Limitation of the Study

Due to logistical constraints and the limited population size within the Sissala West District, the study may face challenges in achieving a large and diverse sample of participants. This could potentially impact the generalizability of the findings to broader populations beyond the district. The study may encounter limitations related to financial resources, access to educational materials, and availability of trained personnel to facilitate play-based learning activities. These constraints could affect the scope and depth of the research, as well as the implementation of interventions. English is the official language of instruction in Ghanaian schools, including those in the Sissala West District. However, some early grade learners may have limited proficiency in English, which could pose challenges in communication and data collection, particularly during interviews or assessments. Conducting research in educational settings requires careful planning and coordination with school administrations, teachers, and students. Time constraints, including school schedules, holidays, and other commitments, may limit the researcher's ability to collect data within a specific timeframe, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the study.

1.8 Definition of Operational Terms

- ❖ **Play activities:** A game or fun activity in which a pre-school child is engaged in.
- ❖ **Play instruction:** The use of play in teaching children

- ❖ **Play materials:** Anything natural or artificial/improvised, props or loose parts, which a child or a teacher can use for fantasy or recreation, inside or outside class.
- ❖ **Play:** It is a vital experience through which children learn social, conceptual and creative skills, as well as increase their knowledge and understanding of the world around them either on their own or guided by a teacher at early childhood centres at the Sissala West District.
- ❖ **Pre-school teacher:** A person who teaches children in pre-primary school.
- ❖ **Pre-school:** These are the formal institutions where 3 to 6-year-olds are cared for by trained persons referred to as nursery schools, kindergartens and day care centers
- ❖ **Teaching strategy:** Teaching method or technique that a pre-primary school teacher uses to introduce a new concept, or reinforce a concept.
- ❖ **Use of play:** Involving fun activities with or without objects to facilitate the learning of concepts.



1.9 Organisation of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, Significance of the study, delimitation of the study, the definition of operational terms and organizations of the study. Chapter two entails reviewed literature related to the study. Chapter three is about the methodology used for the study which included the research design, population, sampling procedures, data collection instrument, data analysis. Chapter four has the presentation and analysis of results and a discussion of the findings. Chapter five is a summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This section reviews relevant literature on play-based learning in the context of early grade learners, particularly focusing on its implementation and impact within the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana. It was based on the importance of play in early childhood, an overview of play in early childhood development, the role of play as a teaching and learning method and the role of teachers in play. Play-based learning has gained increasing recognition as a valuable approach to early childhood education, facilitating holistic development and fostering a love for learning among young children Parker & Thomsen, (2019).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study will examine the early childhood education theories like Navist theory, sociocultural theory, Vygotskian theory and cognitive constructivism to early childhood learning.

2.1.1 Navist Theory

Navist theory on language acquisition holds that people are born with a predisposition to learn the language. The theory holds that children are born with a hard-wired language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains and that the brains contain the major principles of language, which is ready-made to quickly, acquire language at specific stages in the development process. According to Chomsky's theory when young children are exposed to a language, their LAD makes it possible for them to set the parameters and deduce the grammatical principles because the principles are innate. He states that language structures are heavily influenced by the environment

hence the theory holds that language skills were developed through watching and learning from our parents and other people in the environment. He states that the environment heavily influences language structures. The theory is relevant to the study because it posits that children acquire language in a socially interactive environment with the help of adults who are parents, peers and teachers during play.

It is important to state that the Vygotskian theory, Piaget's theory, Navist theory are supported by Frobel's theory (1952), which emphasizes the need for the child to engage in play with objects. Frobel states that with objects the child will learn the underlying concepts represented by the objects. He not only emphasizes children playing with objects but also playing outdoors with the object.

2.1.2 Sociocultural Theory

From a social constructivist perspective, children build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with the outside world (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky emphasises social influence the roles that adults and peers play in what and how the child learns (Mooney, 2000; Berk, 2006). He argues that the child needs social tools (such as speech, writing skills, and mathematical and scientific concepts) to advance his/her cognitive and intellectual abilities (Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006; Hughes, 2016). Peers and teachers who are able to systematically provide scaffolds to advance the child's cognitive and intellectual front best serve Vygotsky's notions of guided participation. The child should be positioned in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to advance from the existing position to the next level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). As Vygotsky puts it "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p.87).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky believes that much learning takes place when children are involved in activities (Mooney, 2000) where they can interpret their experiences and determine the conditions of the make-believe; discuss roles, objects and directions. Vygotsky (1978) also points out that the cultural reality children live in influences them. In engaging with the environment, the child use symbols in the process of perspective-taking where the child substitutes meanings and negotiates ideas and feelings (Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006). He advocates that social engagement and collaboration with others form a powerful force that transforms children's thinking during the process of such interactions (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.1.3 Vygotskian Theory

Vygotsky's theorizing about child development differs from Piaget's concerning the emphasis Vygotsky placed on the influence of the socio-cultural context on cognition. Differing from Piaget's initial ideas, Vygotsky viewed the social context to be the determinant of the cognitive processes leading to child development (Bodrova & Leong, 2014). Vygotsky viewed play as having a major contribution to child development. According to Vygotsky, the creation of "pretend play situations is what distinguishes play from other children's activities (Smidt, 2009). Furthermore, to have the full benefits of play, he pointed out three essential components of play creation of an imaginary situation, taking and acting out roles, and following a set of rules determined by specific roles (Bodrova & Leong, 2014).

Play, therefore, according to his theory, creates a zone of proximal development as a child's behaviour in play is said to be "above his average age, it is as though he were a head taller than himself (Vygotsky, 1978). In short, the imaginary realization of unrealizable desires contains rules of behaviour that a player is subordinate to and this

subordination teaches him to separate meaning from the object. As Vygotsky (1978) states that the child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Thus, a condition is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees. Separation of meaning from object or action (development of abstract thought) is a necessary component for the development of literacy, a requirement for understanding that, for example, the shape 'a' or 'A' represents the letter a.

2.1.4 Cognitive Constructivism

The primary conceptual framework of Piaget's theory is cognitive constructivism (Berk, 2006; Hendrick & Weissman, 2007; Essa, 2007). Piaget emphasises the importance of young children constructing knowledge (understanding concepts) through their activities, as opposed to being told correct answers by others (Berk, 2006; Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). Piaget sees the child as the source of action, actively constructing knowledge through a process of meaning-making through connection with prior knowledge and the real world (Berk, 2006; Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). When a mismatch occurs, the child experiences disequilibrium, thereby activating his/her mental processes to resolve such disequilibrium, and in doing so, created a new scheme (Essa, 2007; Hughes, 2016; Berk, 2006).

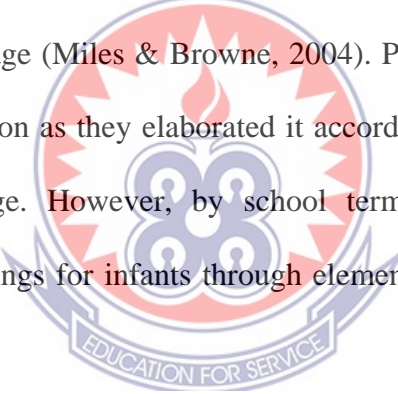
Piaget views cognitive development as a stage process (Berk, 2006; Essa, 2007). A child develops from the sensorimotor stage, pre-operational stage to the concrete operational and finally formal operational stage (Berk, 2006; Essa, 2007). Each of these stages is characterised by qualitative changes in a child's thinking (Piaget, 1962). In the sensorimotor stage, (from birth to two years), the infant knows about the world through their actions and perceptions. In the preoperational stage (from two to six years), children begin to use symbols, images, words or actions to represent their

thoughts. Their thinking is characterised by egocentrism, irreversibility and centration (Berk, 2006). In the concrete operational stage (from six to twelve years), children understand concepts of conservation and continue to expand their thinking and can perform logical mental operations, such as addition and subtraction. In the formal operational stage (twelve years onwards), children are able to reason deductively, to formulate and test hypotheses (Piaget, 1962; Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006).

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Early Childhood Education

The definition of the term early childhood education depends on the angle one picks it. In terms of child's life, early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age (Miles & Browne, 2004). Provost and LaFreniere (2014.) also shared this definition as they elaborated it accordingly as the time between zero and eight years of age. However, by school terms, early childhood education incorporates group settings for infants through elementary school grade three (Miles & Browne, 2004).



In other words, early childhood education is a special branch of education serving children from infancy to elementary grade level three (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). As definitions of these authorities imply, we believe that early childhood education brings or exposes children (birth to eight) into the world. Significance of the early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years. This situation is complementary to research results based on long-term effects of early education on later life (Groark, 2012).

2.1.2 The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education, within the last few decades, considered different fields (Groark, 2012) such as developmental psychology, cultural psychology, childhood studies, cultural anthropology, history and philosophy. This is because recent studies showed that babies and young children are born with the capacity to understand the world around them (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). More so, children's brains are ready to learn when they come into the world. During this process; both the environment and genes take an important role which in turn, builds the brain (Levitt, 2008). Considering what has been said so far by authorities with respect to childhood education, it can be asserted that children are beings perceived as competent learners rather than empty slates. This has therefore brought changes in the way of perceiving children or early childhood education. The readiness of children to learn even when they are just born triggered the idea of the necessity of early childhood education both for the individual child and for society as a whole.

Longitudinal studies have shown that early childhood education is the period when children develop more rapidly and expand their intellectual faculties as they grow. Therefore, education in this crucial period creates significance for the development of children. In a study conducted by Barnett (2015), it was found that getting an early childhood education provided an increase in the IQ level of children in the short term and the long term; it increased the child's school achievement. Early childhood education also becomes more beneficial especially, for children coming from the low socio-economic background. Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) identified the benefits of being exposed to early education for children coming from low-income families as cognitive growth and school readiness. Besides children from the low socio-economic background, good quality early childhood education provides early

reading and math skills to children from high and middle socio-economic status. Early education cultivates children in terms of socialization rather than purely academic enhancement such as math and reading. Webb, (2003) elaborated that children learn cooperation through education in childcare centres and such skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in society. Regarding socialization, parents also share the same perspective. In the study of Seng (2015), it was revealed that one of the biggest reasons for parents sending children to early childhood education centres is to get them socialized. In fact, in a longitudinal study, Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) explained that children who received early childhood education became emotionally and socially more competent adults compared to the ones who did not receive early education.

2.1.3 Concept of Play

The perspective of children's play was initially considered in education as a yardstick for the development of pedagogy (Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2014). There have been lots of research and findings produced over the years relating to the definition of play. Several researchers and theorists define play differently, however, it is clear that many different perspectives views on what play is overlapped with other people's views. Play can be viewed, conceptualized and defined from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives. Play is defined as an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed and episodic (Fromberg as cited in Elkind, 2016). Play is pleasurable and activity is seen as a situation by which children learn and interact with the environment and the world around them. In this regard since there is no clear and agreed definition, Gordon (2009), 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. 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, offers them the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and level of maturation. Additionally, Wood (2009), argues defining characteristics of play include intrinsic motivation, engagement; dependence on internal rather than external rules, control and autonomy, and attention to means rather than ends. Children formulate their own rules to suit and match the play situation. Therefore, children experience joy and skills development through self-motivation.

According to Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008), play is considered a learning situation or an activity initiated by children, on the other hand, learning is regarded as a result of a practice or activity initiated by any adult to help children to learn. Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson further stated that playful activities as well as learning situations are as joyful since both play and learning are seen as an activity that transgression. Play and learning are interrelated; the two words touched on each other in a pre-school setting and further serve as an important process for promoting children's learning and development (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016).

2.1.4 Play in the Preschool Classroom

The central assertion woven throughout this study is the importance of play within the scope of childhood. Vygotsky, Piaget, Montessori, Dewey, and Froebel are several of the prominent pioneers who have laid the cornerstone for early childhood education. Individuals are influenced today by the investigations that these prominent researchers completed. Although their approaches vary, they share the belief that children learn through active participation and that meaningful learning occurs mainly during play

(Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 2012; Elkind, 2015; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Wood & Attfield, 2015). Throughout the 20th century, many studies have been conducted that delve into different aspects of play in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The studies have confirmed that play is an integral part of encouraging children to become lifelong learners (Parten, 2012; Smilansky & Shefatya, 2015). The researcher is curious and hopeful to find studies that have focused on play specifically in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

2.3 Overview of Play in Early Childhood Development

It is widely acknowledged that experiences in early childhood strongly affect human development. Research evidence from longitudinal and neuroscience studies has shown that children's earliest learning experiences are most significant in determining their future progress in education and subsequent success in life (Kwan, 2018). The quality of ECE has a significant and long-term influence on their educational performance and life chances (Sylva and Pugh, 2015). For young children's optimal development, there is a need for consistent and responsive caregivers within stimulating environments where play materials and other opportunities for interaction are abundant. Froebel (1987) argues that play is children's natural occupation before cultural restraints and formal schooling takes over. Play is the first means of development of the human mind. It is the first effort to make acquaintance with the outward world, to correct original experiences, to reinforce facts and to exercise the powers of body and mind (Froebel, 1987).

Bruner (2006), argues that play serves as a vehicle for social, emotional and cognitive development. This implies that the negative emotional and serious consequences of errors and setbacks are reduced in play. In the play, children talk freely and explore

freely and when one is mistaken, he/she is freely corrected causing no ill feelings on both mistaken and corrector parts. By discussing and questioning in such a friendly atmosphere, they develop a critical outlook on issues, which is in itself, the prerequisite for academic autonomy. Erikson (1963), agrees with the idea that children use play to make up for defeat, suffering and frustration. The play has a therapeutic value in that, it takes away the attention from the objective worries about self and focuses on an interesting objective pursuit (Bruner, 2006). In addition, Bruner contends that when children play in a rich environment, they can exercise judgment, mastery and competence, and if they are unable to experience the power and satisfaction that comes through play, their holistic development is likely to be jeopardized. Thus, the ECE programme is supposed to translate the theories and principles related to early childhood development into practice. This involves concentrating on the use of child-centred teaching and learning methods specifically emphasizing the use of play as a teaching strategy.

2.4 Importance of Play-Based Learning

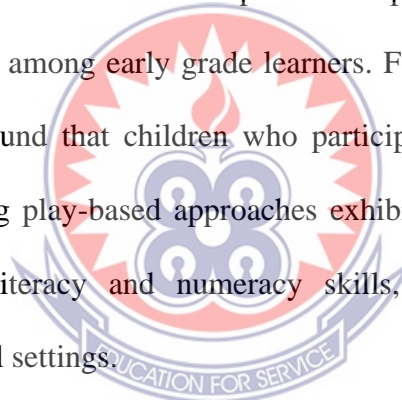
Research suggests that play-based learning promotes various aspects of children's development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Through play, children develop problem-solving skills, creativity, and critical thinking abilities (Hirsh-Pasek, 2009). Play also fosters social skills such as cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution, as children engage in imaginative and collaborative activities (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Moreover, play-based approaches have been associated with increased motivation, engagement, and retention of learning content among young learners (Arthur et al., 2011).

2.5 Implementation of Play-Based Learning in Ghana:

In Ghana, early childhood education policies emphasize the importance of play-based approaches in preschool settings (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, the translation of these policies into practice faces challenges, particularly in rural and resource-constrained areas like the Sissala West District. Limited access to educational resources, inadequate teacher training, and cultural beliefs about the purpose of education may hinder the effective implementation of play-based learning strategies (Anamuah-Mensah, 2007).

2.6 Impact of Play-Based Learning on Academic Achievement:

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of play-based learning on academic achievement among early grade learners. For example, a meta-analysis by Sylva et al. (2004) found that children who participated in high-quality preschool programs incorporating play-based approaches exhibited better academic outcomes, including improved literacy and numeracy skills, compared to their peers in traditional instructional settings.



2.7 Barriers to Effective Implementation of Play in Instruction

According to Kinuthia (2009), teachers are unable to employ early learners in play activities because, play facilities are not available, and early childhood education centres lack leisure facilities, play materials and physical infrastructure. Russell, (2008) noted a lack of available data examining children's use of time and space, and therefore exploring whether children's time to play has increased or decreased in the UK is difficult to track. However, evidence from the US suggests that today's children have significantly less time for free play than previous generations. Tsung-Hui and Wei-Ying, (2008) illustrate that early childhood teachers set up an

appropriate, stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not follow up with supervision, and supportive, reactive interactions with the children as they play. These authors described this as an early childhood error. Some teachers find it difficult to participate in children's play for fear of disrupting the flow of children's play activities. Teachers' involvement in play enriches children's play and develops children's intellectual and social skills. On the other hand, if teachers give more structured cognitive activities through play and take over the control of play at that time teacher intervention interrupts children's play (Tsung-Hui & Wei-Ying, 2008).

Ndani and Kimani (2013) reported a study on the investigation of play facilities and socio-motor skills development of pre-primary school and primary school pupils in Akwaibom State. The research design was a survey design while the population consisted of teachers of nursery two and primary one in 324 public and 185 private primary schools. A sample of six hundred and sixty (four hundred public and 250 private) primary school teachers were selected using a stratified random sampling method. Person product moment correlation statistics were adopted in analyzing the data on the relationship between play facilities and pupils' development of social motor skills in both public and private primary schools in Akwaibom state. The paper revealed that no public schools employed play facilities in teaching and learning while the private primary schools that utilized play facilities lacked play space. The paper recommended that primary schools (private and public) should as a matter of policy employ play facilities and provide play space in the teaching and learning process and this is in line with this study which tries to find out the extent of utilization of play method of teaching and pre-primary in Awka education zone.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

The dependent variable is the variable of primary interest in this study. In other words, it is the main variable that lends itself to the investigation as a viable factor (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). The independent variable is the one that influences the dependent variable in either a positive or negative way (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). It is also called the explanatory variable or predictor variable. In this study, an independent variable is the use of play in teaching. The dependent variables are the teacher's skills, the role of school heads and barriers to the effective use of play in the teaching and learning of pre-school pupils.

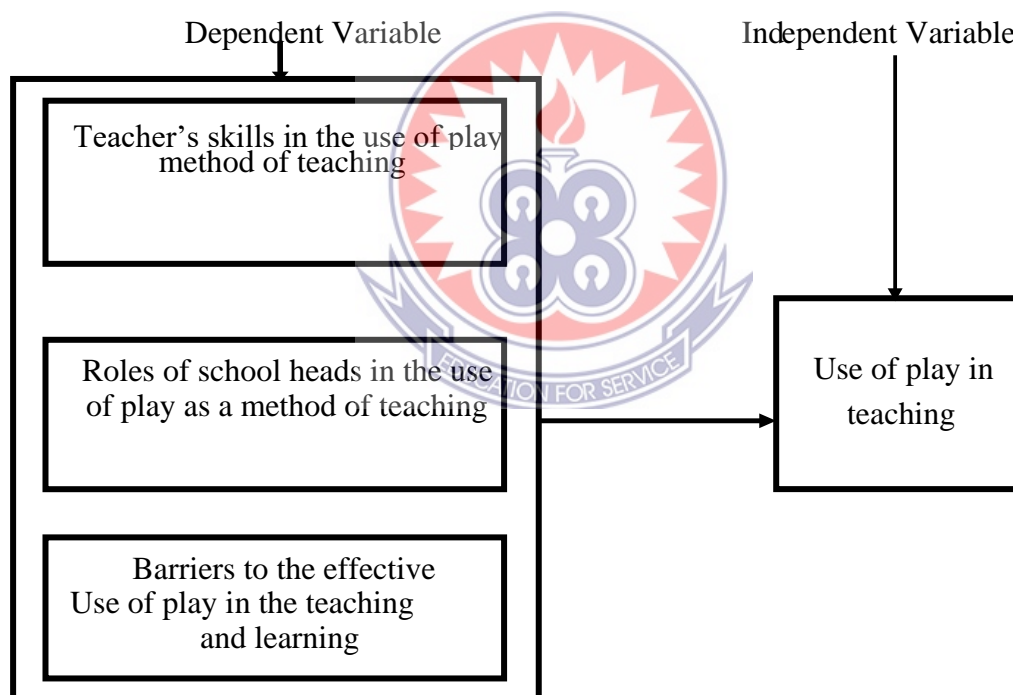


Figure1-Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's construct, 2022

2.9 Types of Play-Based Activities in Early Childhood Instruction

Play-based activities form the cornerstone of early childhood instruction, offering young learners rich and engaging experiences that foster holistic development. This literature review aims to explore various types of play-based activities commonly employed in early childhood education, their benefits, and their role in promoting children's learning and well-being.

Sensory Play

Sensory play involves activities that stimulate children's senses, including touch, sight, sound, smell, and sometimes taste. Examples of sensory play activities include exploring different textures (e.g., sand, water, playdough), experimenting with colors and light, and engaging in sensory bins filled with various materials (Isbell & Raines, 2013). Sensory play not only enhances children's sensory perception but also promotes cognitive development, language skills, and emotional regulation (Case-Smith & O'Brien, 2010).

Imaginative Play

Imaginative or pretend play allows children to engage in make-believe scenarios, where they take on different roles and act out various situations. This type of play often involves dressing up, using props, and creating imaginary worlds (Christie & Roskos, 2006). Imaginative play supports the development of creativity, language and communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and social-emotional competence (Lillard et al., 2013).

Constructive Play

Constructive play involves activities where children manipulate objects and materials to build, create, and construct. Examples of constructive play include building with blocks, Lego, or other construction toys, as well as engaging in puzzles, stacking, and

sorting activities (Fleer, 2010). Constructive play enhances children's spatial reasoning, problem-solving skills, fine motor skills, and understanding of mathematical concepts such as shape, size, and symmetry (Verdine et al., 2014).

Dramatic Play

Dramatic play, also known as socio-dramatic play, involves children taking on roles, acting out scenarios, and engaging in pretend interactions with peers (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). This type of play often occurs in play kitchens, dollhouses, or other themed play areas, where children can immerse themselves in various roles (Hughes, 2010). Dramatic play promotes language and literacy development, social skills, empathy, and emotional regulation (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play provides children with opportunities for physical activity, exploration, and interaction with the natural environment. Outdoor play activities may include running, climbing, jumping, swinging, gardening, and exploring natural materials (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Outdoor play promotes physical health and well-being, gross motor development, risk-taking, problem-solving, and connection with nature (Bundy et al., 2011).

2.10 The Role of Play in Instruction

Play-based approaches have gained significant attention in educational settings due to their potential to enhance learning outcomes and promote holistic development among students. Play, in the context of instruction, refers to purposeful, child-directed activities that encourage exploration, creativity, and problem-solving (Fleer, 2010). Through play, children actively construct knowledge, develop social skills, and engage in meaningful interactions with peers and materials (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Headteachers' Support for Teachers

Headteachers play a pivotal role in shaping the instructional practices within their schools. Their leadership, guidance, and support are essential for creating a conducive environment where teachers feel empowered to innovate and implement effective pedagogical strategies, including play-based approaches (Bryant et al., 2019).

Professional Development

One of the key ways headteachers support teachers in utilizing play in instruction is through the provision of targeted professional development opportunities. Professional development programs focused on play-based learning provide teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively integrate play into their curriculum (Dockett & Perry, 2014). These programs may include workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning communities where teachers can exchange ideas, share best practices, and receive feedback from peers and experts.

Modeling and Mentoring

Headteachers can also support teachers by modeling play-based instructional practices and providing mentoring and coaching opportunities. By observing experienced educators effectively implementing play-based approaches in the classroom, teachers can gain valuable insights into effective strategies and techniques (Perry & Dockett, 2007). Mentoring relationships allow for ongoing support, feedback, and reflection, fostering continuous growth and improvement in teachers' instructional practices.

Resource Allocation

Furthermore, headteachers play a critical role in resource allocation, ensuring that teachers have access to the necessary materials, equipment, and facilities to implement play-based activities effectively. This may involve securing funding for the purchase of educational materials, creating dedicated play spaces within the

school environment, and establishing partnerships with community organizations to enhance resources available for play-based learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2010).

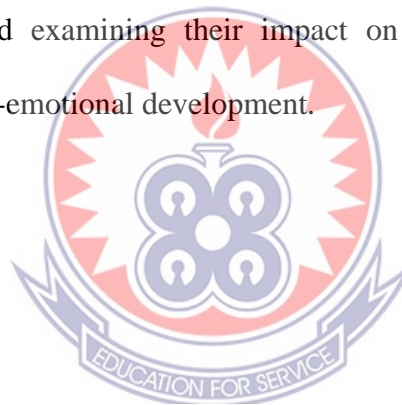
Policy and Advocacy

In addition to supporting teachers at the individual level, headteachers can advocate for the integration of play-based approaches at the school and district levels. By developing and implementing policies that prioritize play-based learning, headteachers can create a culture that values and supports innovative instructional practices (Bryant et al., 2019). Advocacy efforts may involve engaging with policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the benefits of play in education and garner support for its inclusion in curriculum and instructional practices.

2.11 Summary of Literature Review

It is the responsibility of head teachers to provide children with opportunities to play with toys and other play materials where they need to use their imaginations. That type of play is more beneficial than if children were to play with something that has only one purpose or meaning. A child learns best through their interests and exploration of those interests. Educators need to find out the interests of their pupils and build a developmentally appropriate curriculum for that year around what the children are interested in. Children need physical images of objects for them to be completely tuned into the activity. For children to be entirely engaged in learning they need some kinaesthetic movement as well which needs to be provided by administrators of early childhood centres. From birth, children can benefit in many ways from movement. Along with movement, children need to have many opportunities for hands-on learning through exploration and discovery at early childhood centres. Young children also need to build communication skills and what

better way to build these skills than to talk with other children in a dramatic play area. By doing this, children learn one-to-one correspondence with objects and other children, and by communicating through play children gain social-emotional concepts that will follow them throughout their lives. Moreover, most of these research studies and literature relates to geographical, cultural and social context outside Ghana. Hence, this study is carried out with the view of contributing to early childhood education knowledge in the Ghanaian context as well as informing educators and concerned parties on possible improvements to their classroom practices. As emphasized by Karia (2014), there is a need to bridge this research gap by investigating the implementation of play-based approaches in early grade classrooms within the district and examining their impact on children's learning outcomes, engagement, and socio-emotional development.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter presented the research method and various steps adopted in carrying out the study. It was organized under the following sub-headings; overview, setting, research design, population of the study, sample and sampling technique, instrument for data collection, validation of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, method of data collection and method of data analysis.

3.1 Research Approach

Play-based learning has garnered attention worldwide as an effective approach to early childhood education, fostering holistic development and improving learning outcomes among young children. In the context of Ghana, particularly in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, there is a growing interest in exploring the implementation and impact of play-based learning in early grade classrooms. This research aims to investigate the types of play-based activities used in early grade instruction in the Sissala West District and their effects on learning outcomes.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. The design was considered suitable for this study because the descriptive research helps a researcher gain a deeper knowledge of the research problem. Also, the researcher sought to get responses on the pre-school teachers' teaching strategies. Information obtained helped describe existing teaching and learning approaches in pre-schools. Using the design, information about the teachers' perspectives, habits and attitudes on the use of play as a teaching strategy was obtained.

3.3 Setting

The Sissala West District dove-tailed as Sissala West Constituency and is the study area for this research. The Sissala West District was carved out of the then Sissala District in 2004 by the Legislative Instrument, LI 1771. The district is one of the eight (8) districts in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The district capital is Gwollu, located 30km West of Tumu, the capital of the then Sissala District, now the capital of Sissala East District.

Furthermore, Sissala West Constituency is located in the north-western part of Ghana, and northcentral part of the Upper West Region. The Constituency /District is bounded to the north by Burkina-Faso, to the south by Wa East Constituency, to the east by Sissala East Constituency and to the west by Jirapa and Lamusie constituencies respectively. The Constituency covers about 25% (i.e. 4620) out of 18478km² of the total landmass of the Upper West Region (Sissala West District, 2006).

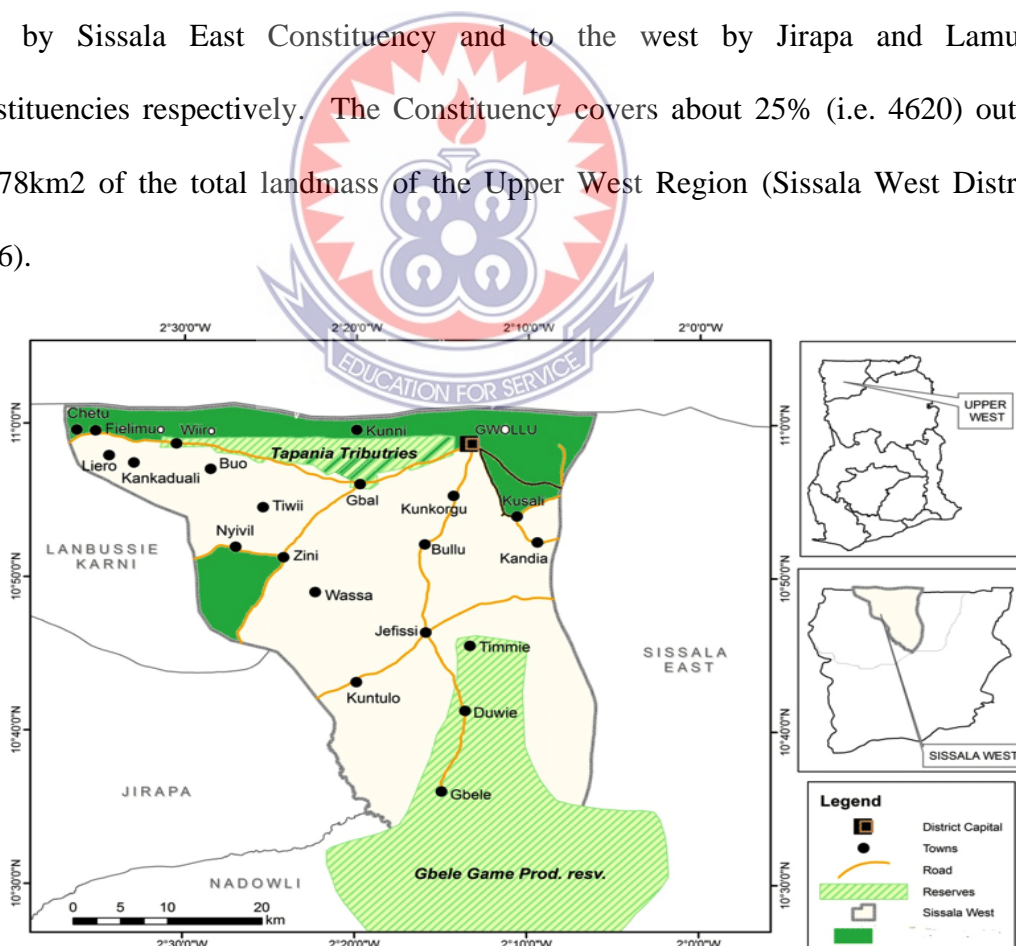


Figure 2: The total landmass of the Upper West Region (Sissala West District

Source: Researcher, (2022)

3.4 Population of the Study

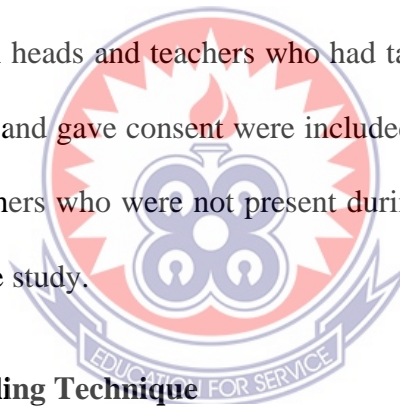
The target population of the study was school heads and teachers of early childhood centres in the Sissala West District. However, there were 52 early childhood centres in the Sissala West District.

Table 1: Population of Head teachers and Teachers in the Sissala West District

Respondents	Frequency (No)
Head teachers	52
Teachers	130
Total	182

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Early childhood school heads and teachers who had taught at the selected centres for not less than 6 months and gave consent were included in the study. Early childhood centres heads and teachers who were not present during the period of data collection were excluded from the study.



3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

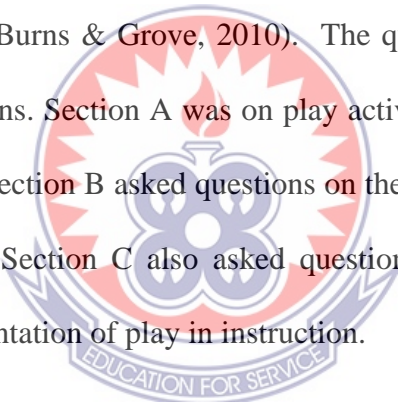
For the selection of head teachers, the study used simple random sampling to select 10 early childhood centres and all the head teachers of the selected centres were considered for the study. For the selection of teachers, a simple random sampling method was adopted to select 10 teachers and 10 head teachers in the 10 early childhood education centres. So, the total sample size for the study is 20, which includes both the selected head teachers and the randomly selected teachers from the 10 early childhood centers.

3.6 Research Instrument

The research instruments used in the study for data collection were questionnaires, observation schedules and interview guide.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire was also used as a research instrument for the study. The questionnaire is made up of closed ended questions. Large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost-effective way through the use of questionnaire (Burns & Grove, 2010). The limitation of questionnaire arises when the problem under investigation is emotional and there is no way to tell how truthful a respondent is being. Sometimes, there is a level of researcher imposition (Burns & Grove, 2010). The questionnaire for this study was made up of three sections. Section A was on play activities teachers engage pupils in during instruction and section B asked questions on the barriers to the implementation of play in instruction. Section C also asked questions about views of teachers on improving the implementation of play in instruction.



3.6.2 Observation schedule

An observation schedule was used in the study to enable the researcher to observe the available play materials in both outdoor and indoor settings. The instrument was chosen since it overcomes some of unavoidable disadvantages of questionnaires where respondents may give biased information (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). Sometimes the respondents fail to accurately recall events and aspects in which the research is interested. The information collected through observation was used to supplement the information collected through questionnaires. The researcher used the instrument to observe the available play materials and play facilities in both indoor

and outdoor settings. For the availability of play materials, scoring was done by the use of 2 and 1 for YES and NO responses respectively

3.7 Validity

Validity in research refers to the extent to which a study accurately measures or examines the phenomenon it intends to investigate. In the context of the study on play-based learning in early grade learners in the Sissala West District. Prior to data collection, the research instruments such as surveys, interview protocols, and observation guides will be carefully developed and reviewed by experts in the field of early childhood education and play-based learning. This ensures that the questions and prompts are relevant, comprehensive, and aligned with the research objectives. The research will utilize established theories and frameworks related to play-based learning, early childhood education, and educational psychology to guide the conceptualization and operationalization of key constructs. By aligning the research with existing theoretical perspectives, construct validity is enhanced. Where applicable, the research findings will be compared against established measures of learning outcomes and child development to assess the extent to which play-based learning influences these factors.

This helps establish the criterion-related validity of the study's findings. To minimize internal validity threats such as confounding variables or biases, appropriate research design and data analysis techniques will be employed. Control measures, such as randomization or matching, will be implemented where possible to isolate the effects of play-based learning on learning outcomes. The generalizability of the study findings to other contexts beyond the Sissala West District will be considered. While the specific findings may be context-dependent, efforts will be made to ensure that the

research methods and conclusions are sufficiently transparent and replicable to allow for broader applicability.

3.8 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of research findings, ensuring that similar results are obtained under similar conditions. For qualitative data collection methods such as observations and interviews, multiple raters or coders will be involved in data analysis. Inter-rater reliability checks will be conducted to assess the consistency of coding and interpretation, reducing the risk of subjective biases. Where applicable, test-retest reliability will be assessed for survey instruments used in the research. This involves administering the same survey to participants on two separate occasions and comparing their responses to ensure consistency over time.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

Before the start of data collection, letters of approval were sent to head teachers of the selected schools and the researcher sought the consent of all participants through verbal communication. Questionnaires and observation schedules were used to collect data for this study. Data collection was done for three consecutive weeks by the researcher.

Questionnaires were administered to all teachers during the break time and the researcher had them back after lessons once they were through. Since most of pre-school classes end at mid-day, the time was convenient for teachers to respond to questionnaires. The researcher used the observation checklist to record all the available indoor and outdoor play materials and facilities. Indoor play materials were observed as the teaching was progressing but the play corners and the outdoor play facilities were observed when the permission to access the facilities was granted.

Also, the observation check list was filed in each of the days when the researcher went to administer or collect questionnaires.

3.10 Data Analysis

Transparent and replicable data analysis techniques was employed, following established guidelines and best practices in qualitative and quantitative research. This enhances the reproducibility of findings and increases confidence in the reliability of results.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

The following ethical consideration was considered for the study.

3.11.1 Informed Consent

The researcher believes that informed consent implies the agreement to participate in research after learning about the study, including possible risks and benefits. This implies that the participants must be aware of what the research entails and how they are going to benefit from the research. The women were given time to consider the risks and benefits of being involved in this research and decide whether to take part without being coerced. Participants were also informed of all the benefits and risks of the study. The schools signed the consent forms on behalf of the respondents. The participants were told about the general nature of the study as well as about any potential harm or risk that the study may cause.

3.11.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is explained as not disclosing information from the participant in any way that might identify that individual or that might enable the individual to be traced. The researcher used coding abstracted data with unique identifiers rather than

names and masking features of specific cases, institutions or settings that may make them recognisable even without names. The researcher considered the way the data was protected from unauthorised persons. Passwords were also used to protect the data on soft copies.

3.11.3 Anonymity

Anonymity means that we do not name the person or research site involved but in research, it is usually extended to mean that the researcher did not include information about any individual or research site that enabled that individual or research site to be identified by others. In the current study, numbers were used on questionnaires in place of participants and the early childhood centre.

3.11.4 Harm to participants

The balance of protecting respondents from harm by hiding their identity while, at the same time, preventing “loss of ownership” are issues that need to be addressed by each researcher on an individual basis with each respondent. The researcher in this study made sure that participants were not exposed to physical, psychological or emotional harm. Sufficient information was provided to the participants so that they could make informed decisions. Data was not disclosed to any other person without the consent of the participants. The researcher carried out a thorough risk/benefit analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of this study. This study assessed the use of play-based learning in early grade learners in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana. Questionnaire, interview guide and observation checklist were used as data collection instruments. The analysis and interpretation of data were carried out based on the results of the three (3) research questions formulated for the study.

4.1 Response Return Rate

The analysis was based on the 96% return rate data obtained from 130 teachers for the study. Ten (10) head teachers were interviewed for the study. This implies that out of the targeted sample of 130, a total of 125 questionnaires were retrieved for the study. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages). The research findings are presented based on the research questions formulated for the study.

4.2 Descriptive Results

4.2.1 Play-based activities teachers, engage early learners in during instruction.

Research question one seeks to find out the play-based activities teachers, engage early learners in during instruction in the selected early childhood centres. The responses by the Head teachers and teachers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results on Play Activities Teachers Engage Pupils during

Statements	MS Criterion Value=3.00	SDS (n=125)
I allow all learners to play with toys of their choice despite their gender	4.24	.623
Teachers interact fully with learners during play to enhance safe play	4.14	.233
I engage learners in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with ball outside the classroom.	4.13	.017
I use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction	4.11	.057
I use dramatic play during instruction	4.09	.283
I integrate games and songs in the classroom learning activities	4.06	.123
I use nature and science play activities in instruction	4.02	.142
Teachers plan for lessons such as role plays to strengthen learners during play	4.01	.123
I use television, video and/or Computer play activities during instruction.	3.99	.252
Mean of means	4.08	.201

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Key: MS= Mean Statistic, SDS = Standard Deviation Statistic, n = Sample Size

Table 2 presents results on the play-based activities teachers, engage early learners in during instruction at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District. The results show that to a large extent, most early childhood teachers in the Sissala West District engaged early grade learners in play activities during instruction. However, it was found that some of the items scored higher mean than others. This was apparent after the obtained average score was found to be larger than the CV of 3.00 ($\underline{M}=4.08$, $\underline{SD}=.201$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Focusing on some items, it was found that most of the teachers allow all children to play with toys of their choice despite their gender ($\underline{M}=4.24$, $\underline{SD}=.623$, $\underline{n}=125$). This implies that most of the teachers take into consideration the toys of their pupils since toys is one of the key play activity. It was again found that teachers interact fully with children during play to enhance safe play ($\underline{M}=4.14$, $\underline{SD}=.133$, $\underline{n}=125$).

In another related evidence, it was indicated by most of the teachers that they engage children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with ball outside the classroom ($\underline{M}=4.13$, $\underline{SD}=.017$, $\underline{n}=125$). It was again asserted by most of the teachers that they use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction ($\underline{M}=4.11$, $\underline{SD}=.057$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Another found play activity was that they use dramatic play during instruction ($\underline{M}=4.09$, $\underline{SD}=.283$, $\underline{n}=125$). It was again indicated by most of the teachers that they integrate games and songs in the classroom learning activities ($\underline{M}=4.06$, $\underline{SD}=.123$, $\underline{n}=125$). The use of nature and science play activities was also found to be used by most of the teachers in the Sissala West District ($\underline{M}=4.02$, $\underline{SD}=.142$, $\underline{n}=125$).

4.2.2 How head teachers support teachers in the use of play in instruction

For research question two, which was raised in order to find out how head teachers, support teachers in the use of play in instruction in the selected early childhood centres through an interview.

The respondents of this study indicated that they support teachers in the use of play in teaching early grade learners by providing play materials, supervision of teachers and pupils, training and education of teachers and motivation of teachers to ensure conducive play environment for pupils.

Theme 1: Provision of Play Materials

In the quest of eliciting vivid responses from the head teachers, one of them had this to share

“.....Hmmmmmm.....I believe that provision of play materials is essential in teaching and learning process. Because of this, last term, I provided play materials such as the number box, word box and the letter soup for the pre-school” (Respondent 1).

Upon further interactions, one of the head teachers had this to voice.....

“.....my dear, the issue of provision of play materials, has been the fundamental challenge in most Ghanaian schools. You see, there is no money to buy the expensive play materials. However, I have provided improvised locally made play materials such as car tyre, ropes, play drums, balls and water bobbles”
(Respondent 2)

In another encounter one of head teachers had this to point out....

“...ooooooooo my dear, the truth is that I don't have the resources to make a play area but I have provided some materials for children play and encouraged my teachers to use physical activities such as singing, running, clapping, ampe and playing of football” (Respondent 3).

Theme 2: Supervision

The issue of supervision was carved out from the main theme. That is head teachers supporting teachers in the use of play in instruction

“...my dear, as for me, I see supervision as one of the key issues in the work I do. I believe that supervision changes teachers' attitude and behaviour in their teaching process. Because of that, I periodically supervise teachers and pupils by engaging them in play activities”
(Respondent 4)

In another revelation, it was asserted by one of the head teachers that

“....With the issues of supervision, For me I always observe the teachers and pupils as they engage in play activities and direct teachers on where they should focus to make the play activities interesting for the pupils” (Respondent 5).

In another related findings, one of the head teachers had this to share with me concerning the issue of supervision

“...eeeeiiii for me, I do not joke with supervision, I have strong believe in supervision. For example during play lessons, I participate in the play activities but sometimes too I observe the teachers as they lead the pupils in play. I always ask my teachers to link the play activities to the curriculum” (Respondent 6).

Theme 3: Training and Education

The issues of training and education was extracted from the main theme. The found responses are reported as below

“...Just last two weeks, I invited a resource person from one of the University here to train and educate my teachers on how to use play in teaching. They were trained on play lesson preparation and linking of play activities to the curriculum and how they can improvise for unavailable play materials”... (Respondent 8).

In a related evidence, one of the head teachers had this to share with me as I further interacted with the head teachers.

“.....my dear, you know what, I cherish training and development so much that I value it's importance. In the beginning of every term I organize workshop for my teachers on the various play activities they can engage the learners in doing. During this workshop, I recommended the need for play to ensure the holistic development of the child....”(Respondent 9).

Theme 4: Motivation

The issue of motivation was not left out as it was related and very important to the main theme. In this regard, the researcher interrogated the selected heads on how they employ motivation in their quest to support teachers in the use of play in instruction

“...In my quest to motivate my teachers to support the use of play in instruction, I allow teachers to use play in their lessons and I have strictly directed the effective usage of play contact hours. I do not concentrate on teaching without play.....” (Respondent 10).

In another encounter, one of the head teachers pointed this out to validate other responses

In my own capacity as a head teacher, I employ motivation to encourage my teachers to use play activities in their classrooms. In doing this, I always motivate my teachers to use play activities in teaching by providing all the play materials they will need and space for the activities....” (Respondent 8).

4.2.3 Barriers to the implementation of play in instruction

Research question three was posed in order to elicit information on the barriers to the implementation of play in instruction in the selected early childhood centres. The responses are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Results on the Barriers to Effective Implementation of play in Instruction

Statements	MS Criterion Value =3.00	SDS (n=125)
There is no enough play materials for children to access during play	4.98	.231
There is no enough space for children’s play	4.87	.344
Misconception of parents about learning through play limit teachers use of play in instruction	4.71	.345
Lack of in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction	4.69	.342
Curriculum emphasises more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction	4.68	.453
Learners are not provided with adequate time to play	4.45	.229
Teachers are less knowledgeable and less interested in use of play in instruction	4.34	.563
School head teachers do not support play use in instruction	2.14	.733
Teachers are not motivated to use play	2.09	.854
Mean of means	4.11	.454

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Key: MS= Mean Statistic, SDS = Standard Deviation Statistic, n = Sample Size

Table 3 presents the barriers to the implementation of play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District. The results show that generally, the inability of the teachers to use play activities is due to some barriers. This was glaring after the obtained average score was found to be larger than the CV of 3.00 ($\underline{M}=4.11$, $\underline{SD}=.454$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Some of the profound barriers were that there are no enough play materials for grade learners to access during play and this hinder their ability to use play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District ($\underline{M}=4.98$, $\underline{SD}=.231$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Another barrier found was that there are no enough space for grade learner's play and this inhibits the teachers ability to use play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District ($\underline{M}=4.87$, $\underline{SD}=.344$, $\underline{n}=125$). It was again found that misconception of parents about learning through play limit teachers use of play in instruction ($\underline{M}=4.71$, $\underline{SD}=.345$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Inadequate in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction was identified as another challenge ($\underline{M}=4.69$, $\underline{SD}=.342$, $\underline{n}=125$). The teachers further asserted that curriculum emphasises more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction and this serves as a barrier to the use of play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District ($\underline{M}=4.68$, $\underline{SD}=.453$, $\underline{n}=125$).

Results from the teachers further suggest that learners are not provided with adequate time to play and this create a barrier to the use of play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District ($\underline{M}=4.45$, $\underline{SD}=.229$, $\underline{n}=125$). More evidences from the teachers suggested that some teachers are less knowledgeable and

less interested in the use of play in instruction and this poses a challenge in their quest to the use of play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District ($M=4.34$, $SD=.563$, $n=125$).

4.3 Discussion of Results

The discussion was based on the research questions of this study. The findings of this study were compared to other reviewed literatures related to this study. The implication of the findings are also discussed

4.3.1 Play-Based Activities Teachers, Engage Early Learners in During Instruction

Findings from this study showed that teachers integrated games and songs in the classroom learning activities, allowed children to play with toys of their choice despite their gender, engaged children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with ball outside the classroom, and used role plays to strengthen children during play. Teachers also interacted fully with children during play, used nature and science play activities, used television, video and/or computer play activities, used dramatic play during instruction and creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction in teaching of early grade learners in the Sissala West District.

The finding of this study is similar to that of Ezenwa (2018) who found out that physical play can be used in instruction which involves children in developing, practicing and refining bodily movements and control. Bodrova and Leong (2013) also revealed that children enjoy being creative by dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play-dough and clay, and using their imaginations so teachers must pay attention to these activities to ensure the holistic

development of children. The finding of this study agreed with the assertion of Bodrova and Leong (2013).

The finding of this current study corroborates that of Kanokwam and Zoe (2013) who indicated that socio-dramatic play ensure children playing with other children and/or adults and provides opportunities for children to make friends, to negotiate with others, and to develop their communication skills when used in instruction. A Study by Aleke, (2011) emphasized role playing technique and stimulation that can be applied by the classroom teacher which involves pupils acting out real situation in a society, in the classroom situation which affirmed the finding of this study. Though the study found out that teachers in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, implored different play activities into teaching, an observation made in one of the early childhood centres showed that only the children were at the playground without a teacher or supervisor. This finding of the study agreed with those of Tsung-Hui and Wei-Ying (2008) who illustrated that, early childhood teachers set up appropriate, stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not follow up with supervision, supportive, reactive interactions with the children as they play. These authors described this as the early childhood error. Therefore, teachers in the early childhood centres must ensure they are actively involved and monitor all play activities in the school.

The study further lends support to the work of Bondioli, (2001) who asserted that, teacher-child interaction during play activities may assist children to foster and exercise their play skills that they have yet to master or developed. Through play interactions, teachers can provide children with developmentally appropriate materials, ideas, practical achievements and support them in the development of their

own thoughts and interests (Frost et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). The results again share common believe with other research studies which have indicated that through play, teachers can serve as links between children and their surrounding world. Through play interactions, teachers can validate and challenge children's senses and their thoughts, which will enable children to focus on awareness, interactions and intentions (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006).

4.3.2 Kind of Support Head teachers Provide for Teachers in the Use of Play in Instruction

With regard to the kind of support head teachers provide for their teachers to ensure effective use of play in instruction, this study revealed that head teachers have the responsibility of providing play materials, supervision of teachers and pupils, training and education of teachers and motivation of teachers to ensure play environment that support constructive play for pupils. The finding of this study is consistent with those of Howard, Jenvey and Hill, (2006) and Drew et al. (2008) who stated that early childhood heads have the task of setting up learning environments that encourage more meaningful play for children by providing young children the needed appropriate amount of time, and open-ended materials for play activities in school. Moreover, the finding of this study agreed with that of Sassoon (2007) who indicated that head teachers of early childhood centres should provide space and appropriate periods for children to experience a holistic learning through play to sustain interest and development of pupils.

The results from the recent study lend ample study to a number of studies have focused on the role of the teacher in facilitating children's learning through play and that teacher participation in classroom playful activities encourages children's

involvement in such activities (Pugh & Duff 2006; Anning & Edwards, 2006). Similar to the recent study, other research studies have indicated that through play, teachers can serve as links between children and their surrounding world. Through play interactions, teachers can validate and challenge children's senses and their thoughts, which will enable children to focus on awareness, interactions and intentions (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006).

4.3.3 Barriers to the effective implementation of play in instruction

This study found out that barriers such as inadequate play materials for children to access during play, learners not provided with adequate time to play, not having enough space for children's play, teachers not motivated to use play, curriculum emphasising more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction, lack of in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction and misconception of parents about learning through play limited teachers use of play in instruction. Thus, all these negatively affect the use of play in instruction at the early childhood centres in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region.

The finding of this study is consistent with those of Ndani and Kimani (2010) who revealed that teachers are unable to employ pre-scholars in play activities because, play facilities are not available, and early childhood education centres lack leisure facilities, play materials and physical infrastructure. Additionally, the finding of the study agreed with BafourAwuah (2011) who revealed that play period is often too short and is generally under-utilized by teachers in the implementation of curriculum. BafourAwuah (2011) further stated that play has been overlooked as a valuable learning resource in classrooms in the majority of pre-school classrooms in Ghana.

Past research has well documented elsewhere the challenges of the shift towards more academically focused kindergarten teaching than emphasis on play in instruction (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Jeynes, 2006) and these past research works is in line with the finding of this current study.

Head teachers and teachers in this study underscored the importance of play in child development and therefore came out with suggestions for improving use of play in instruction at the early childhood centres. They indicated that provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments by Education directors and head teachers, teachers modelling play and introducing children to new play opportunities, teachers ensuring proper time management to ensure play is used in instruction, authorities making available play materials for play activities and the Ministry of Education organizing in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction would ensure effective use of play in instruction.

The views expressed by head teachers and teachers in this study agreed with that of Kamerman, (2006) who also revealed that head teachers and teachers have a variety of roles in supporting integration of children's play in early childhood education (ECE) curriculum by providing materials for play, encouraging high quality play, structuring environments for play, modelling play and introducing children to new play opportunities. Moreover, it is important that teachers arrange for physical places suitable for different types of play and decide how play periods can fit into the daily routines and schedules of the school and class.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study and the key findings of the study. It also highlighted on the conclusions and recommendations of the study as well as provided suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study aimed at assessing the use of play-based learning in early grade learners in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to evaluate play-based activities teachers, engage early learners in during instruction, to examine how head teachers, support teachers in the use of play in instruction and to investigate the barriers to the implementation of play in instruction. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Questionnaire and interview guide were used as data collection instruments. simple random sampling and purposive sampling method was adopted to selecting teachers, early childhood education centres and headtecahers respectively. Pre-testing of the instrument was done and reliability and validity were ensured. Ethical consideration was also ensured before the actual data collection. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

5.1.1 Key Findings

The following key findings were derived from this study based on the research questions of the study.

1. It was found that head teachers in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, support teachers in the use of play in teaching early grade learners by providing play materials, supervision of teachers, training and education of teachers as well as motivation of teachers.
2. Play activities employed by teachers in the use of play in instruction included integration of games and songs in the classroom learning activities, engaging children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with balls outside the classroom, use of role plays to strengthen children during play, use of television, video and/or computer play activities, use of dramatic play during instruction and creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil and cut-out ocean animals) activities.
3. Barriers such as inadequate play materials for children to access during play, learners not provided with adequate time to play, inadequate space for children's play, teachers not motivated to use play, curriculum emphasising more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction, inadequate in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction and misconception of parents about learning through play limited teachers use of play in instruction in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the importance of play-based learning in early grade education in the Sissala West District of Ghana. Despite facing challenges, play-based activities were perceived as effective in promoting learning outcomes and fostering holistic development among early grade learners. The study highlights the need for continued support and resources to further enhance the implementation of

play-based approaches in classrooms. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the benefits of play-based learning, educators and policymakers can contribute to improving the quality of early childhood education in the region.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be established that play in the early grade classroom is vital for the healthy development of learners. The teachers indicated that they integrate different kinds of plays in their instruction. Head teachers support teachers in the use of play in teaching early grade learners by providing play materials, supervision of teachers, training and education of teachers as well as motivation of teachers.

Early childhood teachers in the Sissala West District integrate and assimilate games and songs in the classroom learning activities, engaging children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with balls and toys outside the classroom. The teachers use role plays, television, video and/or computer play activities, dramatic play, and creativity-colouring of ocean animals to motivate children during instruction.

Some challenges teachers face in their quest to implement their ideas in the use of play are inadequate play materials for children to access during play, learners not provided with adequate time to play, inadequate space for children's play, teachers not motivated to use play, curriculum emphasising more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction and inadequate in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are hereby made.

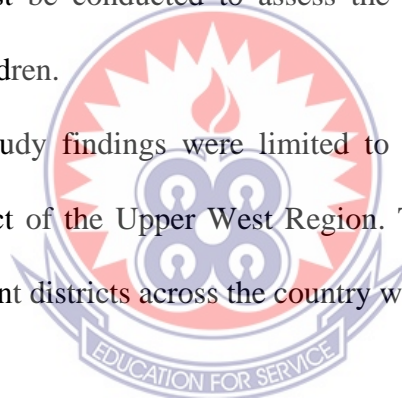
1. Early childhood centres should be allocated sufficient time on the timetable for early grade learners to engage in play activities. Time allocated for play activities should not be used for teaching other subjects.
2. Teachers in the early childhood centres should improvise in making available some play or instructional materials needed in play activities during instruction and head teachers should strengthen their supervision and monitoring role to motivate teachers to use play activities in teaching.
3. Government through the Ministry of Education should train teachers at the early childhood centres at workshops, seminars and refresher courses on the use of play in instruction.
4. The Ghana Education service should partner parent associations to provide adequate play materials for early childhood centres across the country.
5. Use of play in instruction at the early grade school is a must do innovation or method of teaching children which all early childhood centres educators must strictly adhere to. It is important that all stakeholders of education ensure the needed resources and training are offered to teachers to motivate them use play in their teaching and learning activities.
6. The Ministry of Education should regulate the early childhood training programmes by ensuring that the training programmes and institutions emphasize on the use of appropriate teaching strategies and pedagogies such as the use of play. In this regard early childhood education teachers training institutions should be encouraged to use adequate skills on accessing play materials and ways on how they can be used to facilitate teaching and learning in a playful manner.
7. Additionally, early childhood practitioners should continually avail themselves for professional development and training and such training should not only advance

new knowledge (both theoretical and pedagogical), but also serve to influence teachers belief structures and attitudinal dimensions towards using play as a curricular tool.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

The following are some suggested areas that can be considered for further studies:

1. The scope of this study can also be meaningfully extended to embrace perspectives of administrators and parents as their perspectives may serve to complement the perspectives of early childhood teachers in addressing potential gaps and challenges to be addressed by educational policy makers.
2. Further studies must be conducted to assess the impact of play on the holistic development of children.
3. Additionally, the study findings were limited to early childhood centres in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region. Therefore, this study should be conducted in different districts across the country with larger sample size.



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APPENDIX

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

This study intends to assess the use of play-based learning in early grade learners in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region, Ghana. It is expected that the information that you provide from the study will help improve curriculum implementation of ECE. Kindly answer all the questions as truthfully and accurately as possible. Be assured of total confidentiality of the information provided. Do not write your name, indicate your answers and tick (✓) where appropriate.

Section A: Demographic information

1. Indicate your gender

Male []

Female []

2. What is your age bracket?

18 – 25 []

26 – 33 []

34 – 41 []

42 – 49 []

50 and above []

3. How long have you taught in the present pre-school?

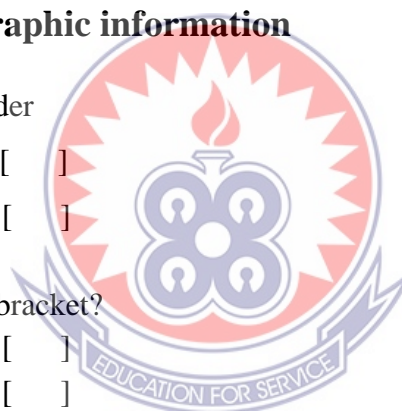
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1-3 years []

4-6 years []

7-9 years []

10 and above []



Section B: Play-based activities teachers engage pupils during instruction

INSTRUCTION: Please indicate in the table the play-based activities teachers engage pupils during instruction. Please read the statements carefully and tick [] the answer from the corresponding box that best describes your choice of response.

Play-based activities teachers engage pupils during instruction	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
1). I integrate games and songs in the classroom learning activities					
2). I allow all learners to play with toys of their choice despite their gender					
3). Teachers plan for lessons such as role plays to strengthen learners during play					
4). Teachers interact fully with learners during play to enhance safe play					
5). I use dramatic play during instruction					
6). I use nature and science play activities in instruction					
7). I use television, video and/or Computer play activities during instruction.					
8). I observe learners play and assess their participation in play					
9). I engage learners in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with ball outside the classroom					
10). I use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction					

11). Others (specify):

.....

.....

Section C: Barriers to the implementation of play in instruction

INSTRUCTION: Please indicate in the table the barriers to the implementation of play in instruction. Please read the statements carefully and tick [√] the answer from the corresponding box that best describes your choice of response.

Barriers to the use of play in instruction	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
12). There is no enough play materials for learners to access during play					
13). School head teachers do not support play use in instruction					
14). Learners are not provided with adequate time to play					
15). There is no enough space for learner's play					
16). Teachers are not motivated to use play					
17). Curriculum emphasises on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction					
18). Teachers are less knowledgeable and less interested in use of play in instruction					
19). Inadequate in-service training for teachers on the use of play in instruction					
20). Misconception of parents about learning through play limit teachers use of play in instruction					

21). Others (specify):

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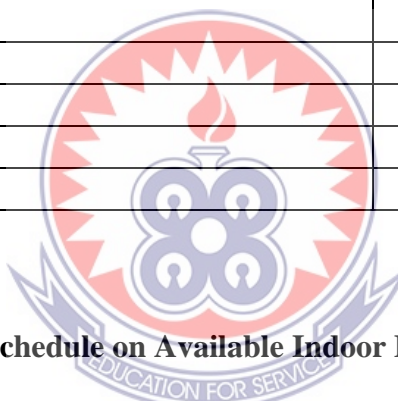
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OBSERVATION SCHEDULE (HEAD TEACHERS)

Availability of play materials Please (tick where is appropriate

Part A- Available play materials for indoor teaching and learning

Available Play Materials	YES	NO
Toys		
Scoops		
Ropes		
Boxes		
Funnels		
Tins		
Play cards		
Bottle tops		
Seeds		
Blocks		
Others (Specify)		



Part B. Observation Schedule on Available Indoor Play Facilities

Available Play Indoor Corners	YES	NO
Shop corner		
Construction corner		
Animals corner		
Plant corner		
Cooking corner		
Reading corner		
Music corner		
Transport corner		
Hospital corner		
Others (Specify)		

Part C- Observation Schedule on Available Outdoor Play Facilities

Available Outdoor Play Facilities	YES	NO
Open space		
Swings		
Sliding panels		
Sand play areas		
Water play areas		
See-saws		
Others (Specify)		

