UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

TEACHERS' USE OF GUIDED PLAY IN EARLY GRADE SETTINGS IN THE NANUMBA NORTH MUNICIPALITY

ABDUL RAHMAN ALIDU

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

2024

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

TEACHERS' USE OF GUIDED PLAY IN EARLY GRADE SETTINGS IN THE NANUMBA NORTH MUNICIPALITY

ABDUL RAHMAN ALIDU
(8231900017)

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (Early Childhood Education)

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
FACULTY OF APPLIED BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DECEMBER, 2024

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Abdul Rahman Alidu**,** declare that this thesis is a result of my original research except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged and it has neither in whole nor in part been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Signature: …….

Date: ……..

Supervisor's Declaration

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

Professor Hans Kweku Wiabo Baffoe (Supervisor)

Signature: …….

Date: ……..

DEDICATION

To my lovely family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following individuals whose unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout the journey of completing this thesis. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Hans Kweku Wiabo Baffoe for his unwavering dedication and expertise. His mentorship and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping the course of this research. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to members of my family for their endless encouragement, love, and understanding. Their belief in my abilities has been my greatest motivation. I want to acknowledge my friends and colleagues for their support, stimulating discussions, and for providing me with much-needed breaks during this demanding journey. This thesis is a culmination of the collective efforts and support of all those mentioned above. While I have endeavoured to list everyone, who has played a significant role, any omission is unintentional and in no way diminishes the significance of your contributions. Thank you all for being an integral part of this academic endeavour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Using a concurrent triangulation design, this study aimed to examine teachers' use of guided play in Early Grade Centre settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. The population for the study consisted of early childhood teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality. A census technique was used to select 100 early childhood teachers for the quantitative phase, while purposive sampling was employed to select 9 headteachers. The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire for the quantitative phase and a structured interview guide for the qualitative phase. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The findings revealed that most early childhood teachers recognized the importance of guided play in promoting learners' cognitive, social, and emotional development. However, the effective implementation of guided play was hindered by factors such as large class sizes, lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, and insufficient in-service training. It was also found that while some teachers integrated guided play into their instructional strategies, others lacked the pedagogical knowledge and support to do so effectively. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the District Education Directorate of Nanumba North Municipality should organize regular professional development workshops on guided play methodologies, ensure the provision of adequate teaching and learning resources, and support early childhood teachers in reducing class sizes to facilitate more effective use of guided play in teaching and learning.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Worldwide, education scholars had increasingly emphasized active learning approaches that engaged learners meaningfully to improve knowledge retention and skill acquisition (Gupta & Gupta, 2018). The quotation "Tell me, and I will forget; show me, and I may understand; involve me, and I will remember" reflected this educational philosophy, highlighting the importance of learner involvement in the teaching process. Guided play, as a pedagogical approach, emerged from this understanding and had been recognized for its ability to combine child-led exploration with adult guidance, fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2011). Studies conducted globally demonstrated that guided play improved children's problem-solving skills, creativity, and motivation, thereby contributing significantly to holistic development beyond traditional didactic methods (Parker et al., 2022; Whitebread, 2012).

In Africa, educational reforms had increasingly focused on improving early childhood education through play-based methodologies to address challenges such as low learner engagement and poor foundational skills (Morrissey et al., 2007; Aura et al., 2021). However, many African countries experienced barriers including insufficient teaching and learning materials, inadequate teacher training, and overcrowded classrooms, which limited the successful implementation of guided play (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2019). These systemic issues had constrained the full realization of guided play's benefits in the region, thus necessitating more contextualized research on its adoption and the factors that influenced teachers' use of this pedagogy.

Within Ghana, play-based learning had historically been part of early childhood education, dating back to the Basel Mission's introduction of kindergartens in the mid-19th century (Agbenyegah, 2008). The Ghanaian early education curriculum had incorporated activities such as storytelling, interactive learning, and the use of mathematical games to promote learning through play (Nsowah-Nuamah et al., 2017; Badu, 2015). Despite these efforts, research revealed that the practical application of guided play was inconsistent across the country due to challenges like lack of instructional materials, limited teacher preparedness, and large class sizes (Doku & Asare, 2022; Ndani, 1994 as cited in Abdulai & Batimah, 2018). These gaps hindered teachers from fully employing guided play as an effective teaching strategy in early grade classrooms.

Focusing on the Nanumba North Municipality, located in the Northern Region of Ghana, the area was characterized by socio-economic and infrastructural constraints that impacted educational quality (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Limited availability of resources, coupled with insufficient teacher training opportunities, had contributed to challenges in implementing innovative pedagogical approaches like guided play (Doku & Asare, 2022). The use of guided play in early grade settings within this municipality had been under-researched, creating a knowledge gap regarding the factors that influenced its adoption, the availability of supporting materials, and the role of curriculum guidelines and teacher training in shaping its usage.

Previous studies had underscored that the availability of teaching and learning materials was a critical factor influencing teachers' motivation and ability to integrate guided play into their classrooms (Ndani, 1994 as cited in Abdulai & Batimah, 2018;

Cook et al., 2023). Additionally, teacher training had been identified as a pivotal element in equipping educators with the necessary skills to effectively facilitate guided play and create learning environments conducive to child development (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2019). Moreover, curriculum guidelines had the potential to shape instructional practices by providing frameworks and standards that either supported or limited the use of play-based learning (Bates, 2005).

Given these realities, this study sought to determine the factors that influenced early grade teachers' use of guided play in the Nanumba North Municipality. It also aimed to investigate the availability of teaching and learning materials that supported guided play, examine the impact of teacher training on its usage, and assess the role of curriculum guidelines in shaping teachers' implementation of guided play. Addressing these objectives was critical to informing policy and practice that would enhance the quality of early childhood education within the municipality and similar contexts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the Nanumba North Municipality of the Northern Region of Ghana, the use of guided play as an instructional strategy in early grade classrooms remains limited, inconsistent, and poorly understood. Despite policy efforts by the Ghana Education Service to promote child-centered, activity-based learning in early childhood education, many teachers continue to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-directed methods of instruction (Doku & Asare, 2022). This reality is concerning because guided play has been proven globally to enhance learners' engagement, creativity, cognitive development, and foundational literacy and numeracy skills (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2022). The underutilization of guided play

in the study area, therefore, undermines the development of essential competencies among young learners during their critical formative years.

This issue presents a significant educational challenge because the Nanumba North Municipality is already confronted with systemic barriers including large class sizes, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate access to teaching and learning materials (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). These challenges make it even more difficult for teachers to adopt innovative and effective instructional approaches like guided play. Additionally, anecdotal evidence and preliminary observations in the area indicate that many early grade teachers have not received sufficient professional training or ongoing support to implement guided play, and there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding how curriculum guidelines support its use in daily classroom practices.

Investigating this problem is crucial because early childhood education lays the foundation for lifelong learning. If teachers are not adequately equipped to implement guided play, young learners in Nanumba North risk missing out on critical learning experiences that promote curiosity, collaboration, and problem-solving—skills that are essential for future academic success. Furthermore, examining the specific barriers and enabling factors to guided play in this context can inform targeted interventions and policy adjustments to improve early grade teaching across similar under-resourced districts.

Although several studies have been conducted on play-based learning and early childhood education in Ghana, few have focused specifically on guided play and its implementation in the Nanumba North Municipality. For example, Badu (2015) examined the use of storytelling and play in kindergartens in Accra, and Abdulai &

Batimah (2018) explored challenges facing early childhood education in Tamale. However, these studies did not focus on guided play as a structured pedagogical approach that combines teacher direction with child-led exploration. Moreover, they lacked a comprehensive analysis of how factors such as teaching and learning materials, teacher training, and curriculum guidelines influence the actual use of guided play in rural or underserved areas.

What remains missing from the existing body of research is a contextual study that specifically examines the factors influencing the use of guided play among early grade teachers in Nanumba North Municipality, including the availability of materials, teacher preparation, and curricular support. This study differs from previous ones by taking a holistic and localized approach to understanding the systemic and institutional factors affecting the practice of guided play in a rural Ghanaian context.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced the use of guided play among early grade teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.

1.4 Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study:

1. To explore teachers' views regarding the use of guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.
2. To investigate the availability of teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.
3. To examine the impact of teacher training on the use of guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.

4. To assess the role of curriculum guidelines in shaping teachers' implementation of guided play in early grade education in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the views of early grade teachers regarding the use of guided play in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana?
2. To what extent are teaching and learning materials that support guided play available in early grade settings?
3. How does teacher training impact the use of guided play in early grade classrooms?
4. What role do curriculum guidelines play in shaping the implementation of guided play in early grade education?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways, particularly in the areas of policy, practice, and theory, and it aligns with the research objectives outlined. In terms of policy, the study provides empirical evidence on the factors influencing the use of guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality. By identifying gaps such as inadequate teaching and learning materials and limited teacher training, the findings can inform educational authorities and curriculum developers on the need to develop comprehensive policies that support guided play as a core pedagogical strategy. This may include allocating resources for teaching aids and integrating guided play into teacher education programs and curriculum guidelines.

From a practical perspective, the study offers early grade teachers, head teachers, and education stakeholders insights into how guided play can be more effectively utilized in classrooms. By examining teacher training and the availability of instructional resources, the study provides actionable recommendations that can improve teaching quality and enhance learner outcomes. It also highlights the importance of creating engaging, child-centered learning environments that support social, cognitive, and emotional development.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the body of literature on play-based learning by reinforcing constructivist theories such as Vygotsky's, which emphasize the importance of active learner participation with teacher guidance.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The study focused solely on the use of guided play among early grade teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality. It specifically examined factors influencing its implementation, the availability of teaching and learning materials, the impact of teacher training, and the influence of curriculum guidelines. Other forms of play-based learning or general instructional strategies were excluded from the scope of the study. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain a holistic understanding of the topic. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from early grade teachers. Additionally, the study was geographically confined to Nanumba North Municipality, and as such, the findings may not be generalizable to other districts or regions in Ghana.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study encountered challenges in finding willing research participants, particularly due to teachers' busy schedules and initial hesitance to participate in interviews or

allow classroom observations. This affected the depth and diversity of data collected. Language barriers and varying levels of familiarity with research processes influenced the accuracy of some responses. Despite these limitations, efforts were made to ensure credibility and ethical research practices.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Terms

Guided Play: Guided play is defined as activities where teachers facilitate and direct play to enhance cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood education.

Early Grade Settings: These settings are defined as classrooms within the Nanumba North Municipality that cater to children in these early stages of their educational journey.

Educational Outcomes: In the context of guided play, educational outcomes might include improved cognitive development, social skills, and emotional resilience.

Teacher Training: Teacher training refers to the preparation and ongoing support provided to early grade teachers to effectively implement guided play techniques.

Pedagogical Strategies: Pedagogical strategies include the specific methods and approaches teachers use to incorporate guided play into their instruction.

Learner Engagement: Learner engagement is measured by observing how actively children participate in and respond to guided play activities.

Teaching Experience: In this study, it is used to explore how the length of teaching experience influences the use and effectiveness of guided play in early grade settings.

Educational Resources: Educational resources include items such as toys, learning aids, and instructional materials that facilitate guided play activities in early grade settings.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction, including the background to the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance, delimitations, limitations, operational definitions, and organization of the study. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature related to guided play, early childhood education, and teaching practices in Ghana and globally. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, detailing the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study by summarizing key findings, drawing conclusions, making recommendations, and suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This chapter presents a review of related literature relevant to teachers' use of guided play in early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. The review examines existing research, theories, and practices to provide a foundation for understanding how guided play is utilized in early childhood education within this context. The chapter is organized under the following subheadings:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. The Concept of Kindergarten Education
3. The Concept of Guided Play
4. Teachers' Views of Guided Play
5. Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials that Support Guided Play in Early Grade Settings
6. Teacher Training on the Use of Guided Play in Early Grade Classrooms
7. The Role of Curriculum Guidelines in Shaping Teachers' Implementation of Guided Play in Early Grade Education
8. Summary of Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study was grounded in Recapitulation Theory (Gutek, 2011) and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). These theories provide critical insights into the developmental and social dimensions of learning through guided play in early grade settings.

2.1.1 Recapitulation Theory

Recapitulation Theory, first proposed by Johann Friedrich Herbart in the 19th century and later elaborated by educational theorists such as Baldwin (2012) and Gutek (2011), posits that a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development mirrors the evolutionary development of the human species and its cultural history. In other words, as children grow, they progress through developmental stages that reflect the historical evolution of human civilization, with learning patterns echoing earlier stages of cultural and social development (Baldwin, 2012). Educationally, this theory suggests that effective learning occurs when teaching strategies are aligned with these natural, sequential stages, ensuring that instruction is developmentally appropriate and scaffolded to match children's evolving capacities.

In early childhood education, Recapitulation Theory emphasizes the creation of learning environments and activities that resonate with children's innate developmental tendencies. These tendencies are often rooted in early human behaviors such as exploration, imitation, symbolic representation, and social cooperation (Seefeldt, 2014; Piaget, 1962). Guided play embodies this principle by providing structured, child-centered learning experiences that reflect early cultural practices, such as cooperative problem-solving, role-taking, and communal interaction, which have historically been crucial for human survival and knowledge transmission (Gutek, 2011). Through guided play, children engage in activities that recapitulate fundamental social and cognitive behaviors, allowing them to internalize essential skills in ways that are meaningful, engaging, and developmentally aligned.

The link between Recapitulation Theory and this study is direct and multi-faceted. First, understanding the theory underscores why guided play is particularly effective

in early grades: it aligns teaching strategies with the natural developmental stages of children. For instance, early childhood educators who recognize the importance of exploring, imitating, and role-playing are better positioned to facilitate guided play that reflects these foundational stages rather than imposing abstract or formal instruction prematurely (Baldwin, 2012; Seefeldt, 2014).

Second, the availability of teaching and learning materials is critical within this theoretical framework. Materials that support exploration, imitation, and symbolic interaction - such as blocks, storybooks, manipulatives, and role-play props—allow children to engage in experiences that mirror early cultural and social behaviors, reinforcing the developmental processes highlighted by Recapitulation Theory (Gutek, 2011). Inadequate or inappropriate materials, therefore, can hinder the capacity of guided play to foster cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Third, curriculum guidelines informed by Recapitulation Theory ensure that guided play is formally recognized as an essential pedagogical strategy. Embedding play-based learning principles into the curriculum provides teachers with a clear framework for implementing activities that support natural cognitive and social progression, promoting holistic development in early grade learners (Baldwin, 2012). In contexts such as the Nanumba North Municipality, where resource constraints and limited teacher training pose challenges, aligning curricula and professional development with Recapitulation Theory can enhance teachers' capacity to implement guided play effectively, maximizing its developmental impact.

Recapitulation Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for this study. It justifies the use of guided play in early grade classrooms by emphasizing that child development mirrors evolutionary and cultural stages of humanity. By understanding

and applying this theory, teachers can design and facilitate guided play experiences that promote cognitive, social, and emotional development in ways that are natural, meaningful, and sequentially appropriate. This makes the theory particularly relevant for investigating factors influencing teachers' use of guided play, the availability of supporting materials, the role of teacher training, and the integration of curriculum guidelines in the Nanumba North Municipality (Seefeldt, 2014; Gutek, 2011; Baldwin, 2012).

2.1.2 Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that children's cognitive development is fundamentally shaped by social interaction, cultural tools, and language. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is inherently a socially mediated process: children acquire knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking through guided interaction with adults, peers, and the cultural environment. Central to this theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the range of tasks a child cannot yet perform independently but can achieve with support from a more knowledgeable person, such as a teacher or capable peer (Moll, 2014). The concept of scaffolding complements the ZPD, describing the temporary guidance adults provide to help children progress from assisted performance to independent mastery of skills and concepts (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Guided play exemplifies the principles of Sociocultural Theory in practice. Unlike free play, which is child-directed, guided play provides a semi-structured environment where teachers deliberately scaffold children's learning. Through this approach, teachers extend children's thinking, model problem-solving strategies, introduce culturally relevant concepts, and encourage social collaboration (Bodrova & Leong,

2015; Rogoff, 2003). Play materials, including storybooks, manipulatives, drawing tools, and everyday objects, serve as cultural tools that mediate learning. These resources allow children to internalize knowledge, develop language, enhance social competence, and engage in higher-order thinking, reflecting Vygotsky's assertion that cognitive development is inseparable from the cultural and social context in which it occurs (Daniels, 2005).

This theory is directly relevant to the research objectives of the study on guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality. First, understanding teachers' views requires recognizing that effective implementation of guided play depends on teachers' awareness of scaffolding techniques and culturally responsive mediation. Teachers must know when to intervene during play to support learning within children's ZPDs and when to allow autonomous exploration, ensuring that play experiences foster both cognitive and socio-emotional growth (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Second, the availability of teaching and learning materials is critical because these materials function as mediational tools that support language development, problem-solving, and collaborative interactions. Without sufficient or culturally relevant materials, teachers' ability to scaffold effectively is constrained, limiting the learning opportunities that guided play can provide (Rogoff, 2003; Daniels, 2005).

Third, the impact of teacher training is closely linked to Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the central role of adult guidance in learning. Professional development equips teachers with strategies to scaffold play appropriately, assess learners' ZPDs, and facilitate cooperative interactions among children. Training programs that integrate Sociocultural principles help teachers design play experiences that are

developmentally appropriate, socially engaging, and culturally meaningful (Moll, 2014; Hedegaard, 2005).

Finally, curriculum guidelines informed by Sociocultural Theory ensure that guided play is recognized as a structured and intentional pedagogical approach rather than an optional activity. By embedding scaffolding, social interaction, and culturally mediated learning tools into the curriculum, policymakers and educators provide teachers with a framework to design play-based activities that align with children's developmental stages and social realities (Hedegaard, 2005; Daniels, 2005).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a strong theoretical lens for examining guided play in early grade classrooms. It highlights the importance of social mediation, scaffolding, and the use of culturally relevant tools in promoting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Applying this theory to the study enables a deeper understanding of how teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality can use guided play effectively, taking into account the interplay of teacher training, material availability, curriculum guidance, and classroom interactions. The theory thus justifies guided play as a pedagogy that maximizes meaningful learning through socially and culturally mediated experiences, directly linking to the study's focus on factors influencing teachers' use of guided play.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

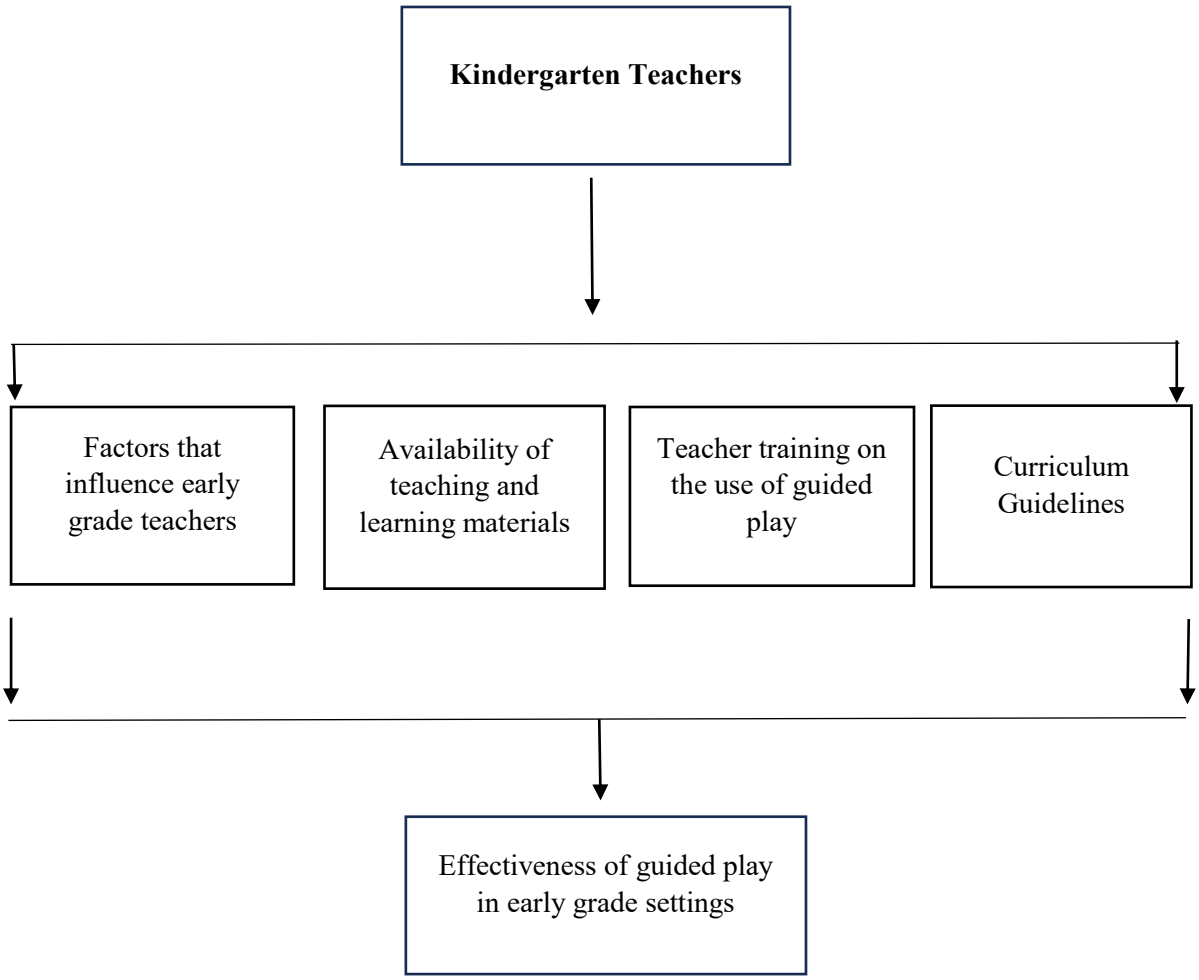

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

Source: Researchers' Construct (2024).

The conceptual framework of this study posits that kindergarten teachers' use of guided play in early grade settings is influenced by several interconnected factors that collectively determine the effectiveness of play-based learning. Central to this framework is the premise that teachers' adoption and implementation of guided play are shaped by contextual conditions, including the availability of appropriate teaching and learning materials, the extent and quality of teacher training on guided play methodologies, and the guidance provided by curriculum policies. These factors interact to either facilitate or hinder teachers' ability to integrate guided play

effectively into their instructional practices. Furthermore, the framework assumes that when these conditions are favorable, guided play becomes a powerful pedagogical approach that enhances children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Hence, understanding and addressing these factors is critical for promoting the successful use of guided play in early childhood education within the Nanumba North Municipality.

2.3 Concept of Guided Play

Guided play is an educational approach that effectively blends structured adult guidance with child-led exploration, facilitating both cognitive and social development in early childhood education. This pedagogical method capitalizes on the natural inclination of children to learn through play, while integrating intentional support from educators to promote specific learning outcomes (Fisher, 2016). Unlike traditional direct instruction, guided play provides a framework where teachers design and scaffold activities that allow children to explore and discover within a controlled yet flexible environment (Weikart, 2013).

The essence of guided play lies in its ability to combine the benefits of both play and instruction. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, cognitive development is deeply rooted in social interactions and the guidance of more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). Guided play aligns with this perspective by creating opportunities for children to engage in meaningful social interactions with peers and teachers while exploring new concepts and skills. For instance, during a guided play activity, a teacher might set up a scenario involving building blocks and then actively participate alongside the children, providing hints and posing questions that encourage problem-solving and critical thinking (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Moreover, guided play is underpinned by Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the range of tasks that children can accomplish with the help of an adult or more capable peer but cannot yet achieve independently (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This theoretical framework emphasizes that children learn best when they are supported in tasks that are just beyond their current abilities. In guided play, educators scaffold children's learning by providing targeted support that helps them reach new levels of understanding, gradually reducing assistance as competence grows (Wood et al., 1976). This process ensures that learning is both challenging and achievable, promoting cognitive growth within the ZPD.

Additionally, guided play supports Piaget's notion of active exploration as a fundamental component of cognitive development. Piaget (1962) argued that children learn best through hands-on experiences that allow them to manipulate objects and engage in problem-solving. Guided play reflects this principle by providing children with opportunities to experiment, test ideas, and develop new skills in a playful context. This approach not only makes learning more engaging but also helps children construct knowledge through their interactions with materials and peers.

The benefits of guided play are well-documented in research, which highlights its effectiveness in enhancing various aspects of development. For example, studies have shown that children involved in guided play activities exhibit improved problem-solving skills, greater creativity, and enhanced social interactions compared to those in more traditional learning environments (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). By combining structured guidance with child-directed exploration, guided play creates a dynamic learning experience that fosters both cognitive and social development.

2.4 Concept of Kindergarten Education in Ghana

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the initial preparation given to children in Ghana for primary education in order to ensure their holistic, physical, intellectual and emotional requirements in order to construct a firm foundation for their total wellbeing and development. In order to achieve this, a resilient sub-systems are required which are built within quality governmental systems working in tandem with stakeholders and partners. ECE centres on the Kindergarten (KG) system where children are required to be enrolled in KG at four or five years, which expose them to early brain development experiences and care and are taught numeracy, literacy, problems-solving using play and games (GES, 2024).

In Ghana, the 2-year Kindergarten system was introduced in 2007 aimed at laying strong bases for lifelong learning to develop kids to be responsible citizens in the future. This was part of the expansion of the Free Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) system which recommended children to be enrolled into a compulsory Early Childhood Education at ages four (4) and Five (5) in KG 1 and KG2 respectively (SIEF Report, 2018).

In Ghana, the Kindergarten system is organised into a 2-year strand or module, which is free and mandatory as foundation for primary school. Initially, children age 4 and 5 years are expected to be enrolled in KG 1 and/or KG2 which expose learners to early experiences such as literacy and numeracy. The aim of the structure and curriculum of Ghana's Kindergarten system, according to Maxwell and colleagues create leaners with literacy, problem-solving, innovative thinking with the confidence to purposefully engage communities across Ghanaian (Maxwell et. al., 2021).

Development of the leaner is crucial at the initial stages of life and focuses on three (3) main areas; cognitive skills, school readiness, and social and emotional development. The cognitive skills centres on the intelligence makeup of the individual and considered crucial for the other learning outcomes. The scope of school readiness takes into consideration the physical readiness and so much concern with the physical health of learners in the learning environment. Thus, appropriate nutrition and energy needed to be provided to aid class work (Kapur, 2018).

Targeted at developing the cognitive skills, readiness for primary education and the creation of the appropriate social and emotional traits in children, the Ghana Kindergarten curriculum (2019) seamlessly integrate thematic areas as contents for delivery at KG1 and KG2. These include Language and Literacy, Numeracy/Mathematics, Creative Arts and Our World Our People. ~~O~~ur World Our People", according to the curriculum, is an integration of thematic areas in Science, Agricultural Science, Geography, History and Citizenship and Religion (Page 25).

Philosophy constitutes basic assumptions, understanding, attitudes and opinions that are critical to understanding interventions that are geared towards behavioural and cognitive change. As opined by Florin (2014), they are the clear manifestations of the actions that actors take in their entire life. These are shaped by individual orientation and experience, personal characteristics, social group norms the actors belongs. Therefore, the beliefs, assumptions, understanding attitude and opinions that undergirds teaching is said to be teaching philosophy.

The teaching philosophy that nurtures the Kindergarten educational system is spelt out in the kindergarten curriculum (KG1 and KG2) promulgated in 2019. As designed, the curriculum envisages and states inter alia;

–Participatory activities, play-based, child-centred experiences which must be established in the classroom to enable learners reflect on their experiences, collaborate and interact with other peers or adults. At this level, learning must be made functional, with the use of real life experiences to help the child apply lessons learned to their daily lives" (NaCCA/MOE, 2019, p.4).

The basic tenet of this philosophy is an integrated approach with play-based pedagogy used together with –inquiry and discovery" for content delivery of the early childhood curriculum. The policy argues that through play, learners internalise their environment and create inner sense of inquiry that helps in critical thinking and creativity about the world around them and what is being learnt.

Lisa Delpit (1995) is reported to have claimed that the culture in white and middle class children's home dovetails into the instructional techniques of most schools and that this offers unbalanced advantage over children of low income homes and children of colour. She asserted that white middle-class children come to school very clear in mind of the expectation, both in academics and in behavioural change. This unbalanced advantage better place the white kids in the spectrum than their minority and low income counterparts to enjoy the benefits of delivery that offers them a level of independence and discretion or to use terminology in literature (Chiatovich & Stipek, 2016). This therefore calls for –child centred approach" of instructional techniques in delivering curriculum.

Early childhood literature has mentioned diverse pedagogical approaches ta the kindergarten level. However, the overarching approaches are direct instruction and child centred approaches. According to Chiatoivh and Stipek instructional approaches focus on the conceptual comprehension that offers some level of discretion in learning

and the instruction that is directed by the teacher (Chiatovich & Stipek, 2016). In contrast, child-centred or skill-oriented instructional approaches have also been advocated by scholars and researchers (Crosnoe, 2010). The primary objective of child-centred or skills-based instruction is serve largely low-income children down the academic ladder (Smith et. al., 2001).

The pedagogical approaches as contained in the kindergarten curriculum (NaCCA/MOE 2019 p.11) mentioned the following as key approaches to content delivery at that level of education;

1. Use of active play based techniques in content delivery.
2. Thematic integration approaches to combined different experiences from different areas
3. Creating learner friendly environment that encourages problem-solving, thinking and creativity.
4. Creation of learner-centred classrooms
5. Positioning inclusion and equity at the centre of quality education
6. Use of differentiation scaffolding to serve special needs of needs.
7. Integration of ICT in the Kindergarten curriculum.
8. Assessment of learners as an accountability strategy.

2.5 Teachers' Views of Guided Play

In Ghana, Abdulai and Batimah (2018) conducted a mixed-method study employing a descriptive design with an explanatory sequential approach to investigate kindergarten teachers' use of guided play in the Sissala East District. A purposive and convenience sample of 100 teachers was surveyed, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Findings indicated that teachers

possessed adequate knowledge of guided play and utilized it in classroom instruction. The study further revealed that teacher characteristics, with the exception of age, positively influenced the use of guided play. Nevertheless, teachers faced challenges related to classroom management and insufficient teaching and learning materials. The authors recommended the implementation of in-service training programs and workshops to enhance teachers' competencies in guided play and suggested the incorporation of play-based pedagogical strategies in teacher education curricula.

In South Africa, Ndabezitha and Gravett (2024) explored pre-service teachers' engagement with guided play within a university curriculum. Utilizing a design-based research approach, the study employed questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of student assignments to examine how teacher education influenced understanding of guided play. Findings demonstrated that pre-service teachers developed a foundational comprehension of guided play and recognized its potential to foster creativity and learning. However, gaps remained in understanding how to implement guided play effectively, particularly regarding the teacher's role in scaffolding and guiding learning activities. The authors recommended that teacher education programs provide more explicit instruction on guiding play to enhance pedagogical efficacy.

Similarly, View conducted a concurrent triangulation mixed-method study involving 120 participants, including teachers, school heads, and supervisors, to examine views on play as a teaching technique in Ghana. Data collection involved both questionnaires and interviews. Results indicated that teachers generally held positive attitudes toward play and acknowledged its role in promoting holistic child development. Factors influencing the adoption of play-based strategies included the

availability of teaching resources, teacher motivation, and professional experience. The study recommended ongoing in-service training and supervisory support to strengthen teachers' capacity to integrate play effectively into classroom practices.

Further research, such as that conducted by Kaatachi and Majid (2024) in Ghana, reported that positive teacher attitudes were significantly associated with the frequency of play-based instructional practices. The study highlighted the importance of teacher preparation and professional development in enhancing the effective use of play in early grade classrooms, corroborating findings from studies on guided play.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, several limitations are evident. Firstly, few investigations focus exclusively on guided play; much of the literature conflates general play or play-based learning with guided play, which is a structured pedagogical approach requiring intentional teacher guidance to achieve specific learning outcomes. Secondly, the reliance on self-report instruments, such as questionnaires and interviews, may reflect teachers' beliefs more than their actual classroom practices. Observational or video-based data would strengthen understanding of the quality and fidelity of guided play implementation. Thirdly, the use of purposive or convenience sampling in several studies limits the generalizability of findings across diverse educational contexts, including rural and resource-constrained settings.

Despite these limitations, a consistent trend emerges: teachers generally recognize the educational value of play and guided play, particularly in promoting engagement, social interaction, and child-centered learning. Positive views are associated with higher levels of implementation; however, inadequate understanding of the teacher's

guiding role, limited instructional materials, and insufficient professional training remain significant barriers.

These findings underscore the necessity of targeted professional development programs to equip teachers with the skills required for effective guided play facilitation. They also highlight the critical role of resource provision and supervisory support in shaping teachers' views and practices. In the context of the Nanumba North Municipality, where similar structural and resource challenges exist, these empirical insights suggest that enhancing teacher training, providing adequate teaching materials, and clarifying curriculum expectations are essential for promoting sustained and effective use of guided play in early grade classrooms.

2.6 Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials that Support Guided Play in Early Grade Settings

The availability and quality of teaching and learning materials are fundamental to the effective implementation of guided play in early grade classrooms. Globally, research underscores the pivotal role that a rich array of play materials plays in enhancing children's cognitive, social, and emotional development within play-based learning frameworks.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2013) found that classrooms equipped with abundant and varied play materials—such as blocks, role-play props, and manipulatives—create opportunities for children to engage in complex symbolic play and social interaction. These materials scaffold children's problem-solving skills, creativity, and collaboration, which are essential components of guided play. Their study emphasized that well-resourced environments not only support children's developmental trajectories but also empower teachers to facilitate more dynamic and responsive play

experiences (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2013). Fleer (2010) similarly argued that learning environments enriched with flexible materials allow children to direct their own exploration while receiving timely adult guidance, thereby optimizing the balance between child-led and adult-facilitated play. This flexibility is critical for scaffolding learning within the child's Zone of Proximal Development, a key tenet in guided play pedagogy (Fleer, 2010).

In African contexts, however, several studies highlight considerable barriers related to the availability of learning materials supportive of guided play. Akyeampong et al. (2013) documented that many early childhood classrooms across Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya face chronic shortages of essential play materials, limiting the extent to which teachers can engage children in meaningful play-based learning activities. The scarcity of materials for pretend play, sensory exploration, and constructive play often compels teachers to default to teacher-centered instructional methods, which are less effective in fostering active learning and social interaction (Akyeampong et al., 2013). Engle et al. (2017) further noted that systemic issues, including inadequate funding, poor supply chains, and lack of policy prioritization for early childhood education, exacerbate this challenge, impeding efforts to establish stimulating learning environments across many African regions.

Specifically within Ghana, Agyeman and Agyei (2019) conducted a study in rural early grade classrooms, revealing that teachers often lack access to teaching aids that facilitate guided play, such as puzzles, picture cards, and culturally appropriate play materials. Their findings suggest that the limited availability of such resources negatively affects the quality of play interactions and learning outcomes. The study called for increased government intervention and collaboration with educational

stakeholders to ensure the provision of affordable, culturally relevant teaching materials that reflect children's social and cultural realities (Agyeman & Agyei, 2019). Complementing these findings, Asare and Mensah (2021) explored how teachers who creatively sourced or fabricated local materials, including natural objects and recycled items, were able to enhance guided play practices effectively. This resourcefulness not only boosted children's engagement but also fostered community involvement and cultural relevance in learning activities, underscoring the potential of localized resource solutions (Asare & Mensah, 2021).

2.7 Teacher Training on the Use of Guided Play in Early Grade Classrooms

In the global context, research underscores the transformative impact of professional development on teachers' ability to implement guided play effectively. Zosh et al. (2017) explain that when teachers receive training tailored to the principles and practice of guided play, their classroom management, instructional methods, and engagement with learners improve significantly. Similarly, Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2016) argue that many teachers may undervalue play as a legitimate educational tool unless they are trained to understand its developmental benefits. Through workshops, modeling, and reflective discussions, teachers begin to see how guided play supports language development, numeracy, problem-solving, and collaboration. These findings suggest that training must not only convey the 'how' of guided play but also the 'why,' so teachers internalize its pedagogical value.

Across Africa, studies reveal both potential and limitations in the use of guided play, primarily due to varying levels of teacher preparedness. For instance, in Kenya, Allee-Herndon and Roberts (2020) conducted a qualitative study with early childhood educators and found that while most teachers valued play-based learning, few had

been formally trained to implement guided play in structured ways. Many teachers expressed challenges in balancing curriculum demands with child-led activities, often reverting to didactic teaching methods. The study highlights a critical gap in teacher education programs, where guided play is mentioned in theory but not modeled in practice. Similar findings emerged in Nigeria, where Oduolowu and Akintunde (2017) reported that teachers trained in traditional modes of instruction found it difficult to adopt play-based strategies, especially in overcrowded classrooms with limited resources. These African case studies point to a need for ongoing, context-specific training that empowers teachers to adapt guided play to their teaching environment.

In the Ghanaian context, the use of guided play in early childhood education is gradually gaining attention, but teacher training remains a significant barrier to effective implementation. A study conducted by Ametepee and Cudjoe (2018) on Ghanaian pre-service teachers revealed that most had only a superficial understanding of play-based learning. Although they recognized the importance of play in theory, they lacked the practical skills to design and implement guided play activities. Teachers reported that their training programs focused more on academic content delivery than on experiential learning strategies, leaving them ill-prepared to use guided play effectively in the classroom. Additionally, many schools in Ghana continue to operate under traditional teaching paradigms, where play is seen as a break from learning rather than a vehicle for it.

Further evidence from Boakye and Ampadu (2021) in the Central Region of Ghana supports the argument that teacher training is a determinant of successful guided play implementation. Their study showed that kindergarten teachers who had participated in targeted training workshops were more confident in using guided play strategies.

These teachers incorporated open-ended questions, used child-centered materials, and allowed learners to direct the flow of activities while still guiding learning outcomes. Importantly, the study noted that mentorship and collaborative planning sessions among teachers fostered a stronger commitment to maintaining guided play routines. However, the researchers also emphasized the need for continuous professional development, as many teachers faced challenges such as large class sizes, limited play materials, and pressure to focus on academic readiness.

2.8 The Role of Curriculum Guidelines in Shaping Teachers' Implementation of Guided Play in Early Grade Education

Globally, curriculum guidelines significantly influence how guided play is interpreted and implemented in early grade classrooms. Countries that embed play-based learning within their national curriculum frameworks often provide teachers with both the mandate and structure to integrate play as a legitimate pedagogical tool. For example, in Finland, the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care outlines a comprehensive vision for using guided play to support holistic child development. The curriculum encourages educators to balance child-initiated play with teacher-directed activities to foster creativity, problem-solving, and foundational academic skills (Pyle, DeLuca & Danniels, 2017). This approach ensures that learning through play is not just permitted but systematically structured and supported.

Similarly, in New Zealand, the Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum is grounded in sociocultural theory and emphasizes that children learn best through responsive, reciprocal relationships and through play-based experiences. Teachers are expected to design environments that promote exploration and to intentionally guide children's play to extend their thinking and language skills (Carr & Lee, 2012). This curriculum

does not prescribe rigid content but instead allows flexibility while reinforcing the centrality of play, enabling educators to adapt activities to suit both learning goals and children's interests (White, Ellis & O'Malley, 2019).

However, in many African countries, curriculum policies often fall short of providing concrete support for guided play, despite acknowledging its importance. In South Africa, for instance, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Children from Birth to Four Years recognizes play as critical for development. Nonetheless, Ebrahim, Seleti, and Dawes (2016) found that many practitioners struggle with translating curriculum principles into practice due to insufficient training and resource constraints. Teachers frequently lack the pedagogical content knowledge to merge curriculum outcomes with guided play techniques, and as a result, revert to more didactic teaching strategies that prioritize rote learning over exploration.

In Nigeria, the situation mirrors similar concerns. While the National Policy on Education and the Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) curriculum stress the use of play as a foundation for learning, empirical findings by Olaleye and Omotayo (2017) revealed that many teachers lack specific guidance on how to implement guided play effectively. The curriculum provides limited examples of structured play or integration strategies, leading to disparities in classroom practices. Consequently, children's experiences with guided play vary widely depending on the teacher's personal experience or exposure to professional development.

In Ghana, the role of curriculum guidelines in promoting guided play has gained momentum in recent years, particularly with the introduction of the 2012 Ghanaian Kindergarten Curriculum by the Ghana Education Service (GES). This curriculum

aims to shift pedagogy from teacher-centered instruction to child-centered, play-based learning. It promotes the integration of structured and unstructured play in areas such as numeracy, literacy, and life skills. However, studies have identified significant gaps in how teachers understand and apply these directives. According to Ametepee and Cudjoe (2018), although the curriculum includes play-based methodologies, many kindergarten teachers either overlook these aspects or misapply them due to a lack of clear instructional guidance and professional development.

Moreover, a study by Boakye and Ampadu (2021) in the Central Region of Ghana highlighted that curriculum guidelines often lack concrete examples and practical tools for implementing guided play. Teachers reported challenges in aligning curriculum outcomes with playful learning strategies, particularly in overcrowded classrooms and settings with limited teaching aids. The ambiguity in curriculum language leads to a reliance on teacher discretion, which often favors didactic instruction, especially when academic performance pressures are high. Teachers who received curriculum orientation or workshops were found to be more effective in implementing guided play, underscoring the need for consistent and targeted professional training.

Further compounding the problem is the view among some Ghanaian educators that play is merely recreational and does not contribute meaningfully to academic achievement. Tandoh and Bediako (2020) argue that unless curriculum documents explicitly clarify the educational value of guided play and provide structured implementation frameworks, teachers will continue to marginalize play in favor of traditional instruction. Additionally, the lack of assessment tools tailored to play-based

learning makes it difficult for teachers to evaluate and report children's progress within this framework, reducing their motivation to adopt it fully.

2.9 Summary of the Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature revealed that guided play was widely acknowledged as an effective pedagogical approach for promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development in early grade classrooms. Previous studies indicated that teachers generally held positive attitudes toward play and recognized its role in fostering engagement, creativity, and child-centered learning. Empirical evidence showed that the availability of teaching and learning materials, teacher training, and curriculum guidelines significantly influenced the implementation of guided play. Teachers who received targeted professional development and had access to appropriate resources were more confident and consistent in facilitating guided play activities.

However, several gaps emerged from the literature. Few studies focused exclusively on guided play as a structured approach, often conflating it with general play or play-based learning. Many studies relied primarily on self-reported data, limiting insights into actual classroom practices and the quality of guided play implementation. Additionally, research on guided play in rural or under-resourced contexts, such as the Nanumba North Municipality in Ghana, was limited, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the contextual factors affecting teachers' use of this pedagogy. Challenges such as insufficient teaching materials, lack of targeted training, and unclear curriculum guidance were consistently reported but inadequately explored in localized settings.

This study, therefore, sought to address these gaps by investigating teachers' views of guided play, the availability of teaching and learning materials, the impact of

professional training, and the role of curriculum guidelines in shaping implementation in early grade classrooms within the Nanumba North Municipality. By doing so, it aimed to provide evidence-based insights for enhancing guided play practices in resource-constrained contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

The chapter discusses the methodology of the study. It discusses the research paradigm, research approach, design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, research instrument, validity of the research instruments, reliability of the instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis procedure and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Paradigm

For this study, the pragmatic paradigm was adopted as the guiding philosophical stance due to its flexibility and practical orientation toward addressing complex research problems. Pragmatism emphasizes the use of multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to generate comprehensive insights that are directly applicable to real-world contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike purely positivist or interpretivist paradigms, pragmatism prioritizes research questions over allegiance to any single method or worldview, allowing the researcher to select approaches best suited to answering the questions posed (Morgan, 2007).

This paradigm aligns well with the current study's focus on guided play in early grade education, where understanding both measurable outcomes and nuanced social interactions is essential. Pragmatism supports an iterative process of inquiry, blending empirical observation with interpretative understanding to develop actionable recommendations (Biesta, 2010). As such, adopting a pragmatic stance facilitates a comprehensive exploration of how curriculum guidelines influence teachers'

implementation of guided play, incorporating diverse perspectives and data sources to address the multifaceted nature of educational practices.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach for this study was a mixed-methods approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods within a single investigation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By combining numerical data with detailed, contextual insights, mixed methods allow for the triangulation of findings, thereby increasing the validity and depth of the results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

This approach is particularly suited for educational research like the current study, where measuring the extent of guided play implementation (quantitative) and exploring teachers' experiences and views (qualitative) are both critical (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The integration of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews or observations enables the research to capture the complexity of how curriculum guidelines influence classroom practices. Furthermore, mixed methods facilitate a pragmatic perspective, allowing the researcher to answer "what," "how," and "why" questions in a single study, thus providing actionable insights for policy and practice (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Research Design

The chosen research design for this study was the Concurrent Triangulation Mixed Methods Design, a specific methodology within the broader mixed-methods approach. This design involves the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by separate analyses of each data set, and then a comparison

or integration of the results to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The rationale for selecting this design lies in its ability to provide corroboration and validation through data triangulation. By collecting quantitative data (such as surveys or questionnaires) and qualitative data (such as interviews or observations) concurrently, the study can capitalize on the strengths of both methods while compensating for their individual weaknesses (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). This approach is particularly valuable in educational research where both measurable outcomes and in-depth contextual insights are essential for a holistic interpretation of phenomena, such as the implementation of guided play in early grade education.

Moreover, the concurrent triangulation design allows for efficient data collection within a limited timeframe, which is often critical in school-based studies (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). It also facilitates a direct comparison between datasets to identify convergences, divergences, or complementary information, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the findings (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This methodological choice aligns well with the pragmatic paradigm of this study, emphasizing practical and actionable knowledge through multiple lenses.

3.4 Study Area

The Nanumba North Municipal District, located in the Northern Region of Ghana, was chosen as the focus of this study due to its socio-economic diversity, agrarian economy, and unique challenges in education and community development. This district, rich in historical and cultural significance, originally formed part of the larger Nanumba District until it was divided in 2004, resulting in the creation of the Nanumba North and Nanumba South Districts. The district was elevated to a

municipality in March 2018, covering approximately 1,986 square kilometers, with Bimbilla as its administrative capital. The municipality lay in the eastern part of the Northern Region between latitudes 8.5° N and 9.25° N and longitudes 0.57° E and 0.5° E. It shared boundaries with several neighboring districts: Yendi Municipal to the north, Mion District to the northwest, East Gonja Municipal to the west and southwest, Nanumba South District to the south and east, and Zabzugu District to the north-northeast. Its strategic location along the Eastern Corridor Road made Bimbilla a key market center, enhancing trade and commerce in the region.

According to the 2020 Population and Housing Census, the municipality had a population of 141,584, with a growth rate of 2.7%. The population was relatively young, with 66% under 24 years of age, and exhibited a high dependency ratio, impacting resource allocation and services. The gender distribution was nearly even, with 49.4% male and 50.6% female. The municipality's age structure, with 47.6% of its population under 14 years, underscored the need for comprehensive social services, especially in education, healthcare, and employment for the youth.

The economy of Nanumba North was predominantly agrarian, with 79.4% of the workforce engaged in agriculture. Key crops included yam, maize, and soybeans, and many households also practiced animal husbandry. However, only 28% of the cultivable land was actively farmed, despite the presence of fertile valleys and rivers like the Oti and Dakar. Other economic activities included wholesale and retail trade (7.6%), driven by the municipality’s proximity to the eastern border, fostering a market for imported goods.

Nanumba North had a substantial educational infrastructure with 268 pre-tertiary institutions, including public and private preschools, primary, junior high, and senior

high schools. The Bimbilla E.P. Training College provided higher educational opportunities, supporting teacher training and educational advancement. Healthcare services were limited, with one hospital, 20 CHPS compounds, and a low doctor-to-patient ratio, which challenged healthcare delivery across the municipality.

Access to potable water stood at 77.6%, though many communities lacked reliable sources, relying on boreholes, wells, and streams that often dried up during the dry season. Sanitation facilities were also limited, with a significant portion of the population practicing open defecation due to inadequate toilet facilities. The municipality's road network included 601 kilometers, with trunk, feeder, and farm tracks connecting rural areas, though road conditions remained poor, particularly during the rainy season.

The municipality was home to unique cultural sites, such as the praying grounds at Kpalga and the grave of Gmantambu at Duuni. The landscape featured Guinea Savannah vegetation with drought- and fire-resistant trees like Shea, Dawadawa, and Baobab, which held economic and cultural value for the community. These resources not only contributed to local livelihoods but also embodied the cultural heritage of the municipality.

The Nanumba North Municipal District's demographic composition, agricultural economy, limited infrastructure, and cultural assets presented both opportunities and challenges for socio-economic development. This study, conducted within this diverse and evolving area, aimed to address the specific educational and community needs unique to this region.

Figure 3.1: Map of Northern region

Source: Municipal Assembly (2023).

3.5 Population of the Study

Population is a set of elements or individuals with similar characteristics that is of utmost interest to the researcher. According to Leroy (2019), a research population is a classified group of elements or subjects with defined characteristics with a study interest and to whom results of the research could be attributed, and they constitute the main focus of the research (Alex & Nancy, 2021). In the context of this study, the population consisted of all Kindergartens teachers who were at the time of the study, teaching in the Nanumba North Municipality. However, the endeavour to survey the entire population could be tedious and ineffective. As such, the research targeted 110 Kindergarten teachers in 55 public kindergarten schools in the Municipality. The decision to sample only public kindergarten schools was informed by the fact that

public Kindergarten schools constitute the majority in the Municipality, with only a few private ones. Besides, it is only the public Kindergarten schools that are visible and located across the entire Municipality.

3.6 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

For the quantitative phase of the study, a census technique was employed. The census technique involves collecting data from every member of the population under study, rather than selecting a subset. This method was deemed appropriate because the population size was manageable, consisting of 100 kindergarten teachers within the Nanumba North Municipality. By including all 100 kindergarten teachers, the study ensured that the quantitative data was exhaustive, providing a complete picture of the phenomena being investigated.

The decision to use a census technique was driven by several considerations. First, the census method eliminates sampling error, which is the discrepancy that arises from selecting a subset rather than the entire population. By surveying the entire population of kindergarten teachers, the study minimized the risk of missing any critical perspectives or patterns that could influence the findings. Moreover, the census technique is particularly advantageous in studies where the population is relatively small and the goal is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Literature supports the use of the census method in situations where the population is not too large, and the research objectives demand a thorough examination of every member. According to Etikan et al. (2016), the census technique is ideal when the population is finite and the researcher seeks to achieve high accuracy and reliability in the data collected. In the context of this study, surveying all 100 kindergarten teachers

provided robust quantitative data that accurately reflects the experiences and perspectives of the entire population, thereby enhancing the validity of the research findings.

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was employed to select 10 kindergarten headteachers within the same municipality. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, involves the deliberate selection of individuals who are most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse information on the research topic. This technique is often used in qualitative research to ensure that the participants selected can offer in-depth insights into the phenomenon being studied.

The rationale for using purposive sampling in this phase was to gain detailed, context-specific insights from individuals who hold key positions within the educational system. Kindergarten headteachers were chosen because of their leadership roles and their deep understanding of the operational, administrative, and pedagogical aspects of kindergarten education within the municipality. Their perspectives were deemed crucial for understanding the broader context in which the kindergarten teachers operate, as well as the challenges and opportunities in the educational environment.

Purposive sampling is well-supported in the literature as a method that enhances the depth and richness of qualitative research. Palinkas et al. (2015) argued that purposive sampling is particularly effective when the research seeks to explore specific characteristics or behaviors within a particular context. By selecting participants who are knowledgeable and experienced in the research area, the study was able to obtain nuanced, detailed qualitative data that complemented the quantitative findings. This approach not only provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research

problem but also ensured that the qualitative data was relevant and aligned with the study's objectives.

Furthermore, the combination of census sampling in the quantitative phase and purposive sampling in the qualitative phase reflects a strategic approach to data collection that leverages the strengths of both methods. While the census method provided a broad, exhaustive dataset, the purposive sampling allowed for a deeper exploration of specific issues and themes identified in the quantitative analysis. This complementary approach is consistent with the principles of mixed-methods research, which advocates for the integration of different sampling techniques to address diverse research questions and objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The selection of data collection instruments is a pivotal aspect of research design, essential for ensuring that the data collected aligns with the study's objectives and provides valuable insights into the research questions. In this study, the chosen instruments were structured questionnaire with Likert scale for the quantitative phase and semi-structured interview guide for the qualitative phase. These choices were made to effectively gather both quantitative and qualitative data, each suited to its respective phase of the research.

For the quantitative phase, structured questionnaire was employed. This decision was grounded in the need for standardized, quantifiable data that could be systematically analyzed to answer specific research questions. Structured questionnaire allows for a uniform approach to data collection, ensuring that all respondents answer the same set of questions, which enhances the reliability and comparability of the data (De Vaus, 2014). This standardization is crucial for minimizing variability that could arise from

differences in question interpretation, thereby providing a more accurate assessment of the research variables. Moreover, structured questionnaires are advantageous due to their ease of administration and analysis. They enable researchers to gather data from a large number of participants efficiently and facilitate straightforward quantitative analysis, which is essential for handling the sizable sample of 100 kindergarten teachers in this study (Bryman, 2016). The use of Likert scale within the questionnaire further supports this approach by allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with statements, thus capturing the intensity of their attitudes and opinions. This method of measurement is well-established in research for its effectiveness in gauging attitudes and providing data that can be statistically analyzed (Likert, 1932).

In contrast, the qualitative phase of the study utilized a semi-structured interview guide. This choice was driven by the need to explore in-depth perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews offer a blend of structured questions and flexible dialogue, allowing researchers to delve deeply into the participants' responses and explore emerging themes in greater detail (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach is particularly valuable for capturing the complexities and nuances of participants' views, which are often not easily accessible through more rigid data collection methods. The semi-structured format enables interviewers to probe further based on the participants' responses, seek clarifications, and explore new topics that arise during the conversation, providing a richer, more contextual understanding of the research problem (Patton, 2015). For example, interviewing kindergarten headteachers allowed for an in-depth exploration of their insights into educational practices and challenges, offering valuable qualitative data that complements the quantitative findings.

3.8 Validity of the Questionnaire

Validity is a cornerstone of effective research, ensuring that the instruments used for data collection accurately measure what they are intended to measure. In this study, the validity of the questionnaire was established through face validity and content validity, which are critical for ensuring that the instrument is both relevant and appropriate for the research objectives.

Face validity is the simplest form of validity, assessing whether a questionnaire appears to measure what it is supposed to measure, at face value. To establish face validity, the draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's colleagues who had expertise in educational research and early childhood education. This review focused on several aspects: the readability of the questionnaire, the clarity of the language used, the feasibility of the questions, and the overall consistency in style and formatting. According to Robson (2011), face validity is achieved when the instrument appears to be effective for its intended purpose to those who review it, making it a preliminary but essential step in validating a research tool.

The researchers' colleagues provided critical feedback on whether the questions were clear and understandable, which is crucial for ensuring that respondents can interpret and answer them correctly. This feedback was instrumental in refining the language and structure of the questionnaire, thus enhancing its readability and ensuring that respondents would not be confused or misled by the questions (Fink, 2017). Additionally, the feasibility of the questionnaire was assessed to ensure that it was practical and could be administered within the constraints of the study. This included evaluating the length of the questionnaire and the time required for respondents to

complete it, which are important factors for maintaining respondent engagement and minimizing survey fatigue (Bryman, 2016).

Content validity refers to the extent to which the items on a questionnaire cover the entire range of the concept being measured. It ensures that the questionnaire comprehensively addresses the research objectives and includes all relevant aspects of the construct. To establish content validity, the draft questionnaire was evaluated by experts in the field, including educational researchers and practitioners familiar with kindergarten education. These experts assessed whether the items on the questionnaire adequately covered the key dimensions of the research topic and were aligned with the study's objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The experts' feedback was used to make necessary revisions to the questionnaire, ensuring that all relevant areas were covered and that any gaps or redundancies were addressed. This process involved reviewing the alignment between the questions and the study's objectives, ensuring that each item contributed to obtaining the desired data and was relevant to the research questions (DeVellis, 2017). By incorporating expert opinions, the content validity of the questionnaire was strengthened, providing assurance that the instrument would capture comprehensive and relevant data for the study.

3.9 Pilot testing of the Questionnaire

Pilot testing is a crucial step in the research process, designed to refine and enhance the data collection instruments before their deployment in the main study. This preliminary phase helps ensure that the instruments are effective, reliable, and capable of capturing the required data accurately. In this study, the pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted to evaluate its clarity, relevance, and overall

functionality, thereby ensuring that the final version of the instrument would meet the research objectives and yield valid results.

The pilot test was carried out in fifteen kindergarten centers within the Nanumba South Municipality, involving thirty-eight kindergarten teachers as participants. This selection of centers and participants was strategically chosen to provide a representative sample that mirrors the characteristics of the larger population from which the final study sample would be drawn. By conducting the pilot test in a similar context to the main study, the researcher ensured that the feedback obtained was relevant and applicable to the actual study setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

During the pilot test, respondents were provided with draft copies of the questionnaire and asked to complete it as they would in the main study. Following the completion of the questionnaire, participants engaged in discussions with the researcher about various aspects of the instrument. This feedback session was instrumental in assessing the clarity of the questions, the relevance of the items, and the overall format of the questionnaire. Key areas of focus included the clarity of wording, the relevance of questions to the study objectives, the logical flow and sequencing of questions, and any other issues that might affect the effectiveness of the instrument (Fink, 2017).

The feedback gathered from the pilot test was invaluable in identifying potential issues and making necessary revisions. For instance, participants might have pointed out ambiguous or confusing questions that needed to be rephrased for better understanding. Additionally, suggestions regarding the format and order of questions helped in optimizing the questionnaire's structure to enhance respondent engagement and data quality (Bryman, 2016). By addressing these issues, the researcher ensured

that the final version of the questionnaire was well-constructed, coherent, and capable of eliciting the most accurate and relevant responses from the study participants.

Incorporating feedback from the pilot test also helped to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument. Validity was ensured by confirming that the questions accurately measured what they were intended to measure, while reliability was enhanced by ensuring consistency and clarity in the questionnaire (DeVellis, 2017). The iterative process of reviewing and revising the questionnaire based on pilot test feedback helped in eliminating potential biases and improving the overall quality of the instrument.

3.10 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability in research refers to the extent to which a research instrument produces stable and consistent results over time and across various contexts. It is an essential aspect of ensuring that the data collected are accurate and that the instrument is free from significant measurement errors. According to Leech et al, (2015), reliability indicates the degree to which an instrument consistently measures a construct, reflecting the reliability of the data collected and the overall validity of the research findings.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure that assesses the internal consistency of a set of items in a questionnaire, indicating how well the items measure a single construct. It is one of the most commonly used methods for evaluating the reliability of scales and surveys, providing a coefficient that ranges from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate greater internal consistency (Creswell, 2013).

Cronbach's alpha is particularly useful for assessing the reliability of questionnaires that consist of multiple items designed to measure the same construct. As suggested by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable for establishing internal consistency. Values below this threshold may indicate issues with the reliability of the instrument, such as poorly constructed items or a lack of coherence among the questions.

In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each section of the questionnaire to evaluate its internal consistency. The draft questionnaire was administered to a sample of respondents, and the responses were analyzed to determine the coefficient for each section. This method allowed for a thorough assessment of the reliability of different parts of the questionnaire, ensuring that each section consistently measured its intended construct (Field, 2013).

The reliability coefficients obtained from this analysis informed the necessary revisions to the questionnaire. Items that did not contribute positively to the overall internal consistency were reviewed and either revised or removed to improve the reliability of the instrument. This iterative process of evaluating and refining the questionnaire was essential for ensuring that the final version of the instrument produced accurate and consistent data (DeVellis, 2017).

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the instrument was 0.71, indicating that it was reliable. As highlighted by George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach's alpha is a reliable and effective tool for assessing the quality of research instruments, making it a suitable choice for this study.

3.11 Trustworthiness of Structured Interview Guide

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research is essential for validating the results and making sure they are credible and reliable. Trustworthiness criteria help researchers demonstrate that their findings are worthy of attention and can be effectively utilized by practitioners, policymakers, and the public. In this study, the trustworthiness of the structured interview guide was established through two key criteria: dependability and credibility.

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time and under similar conditions. In qualitative research, it parallels the concept of reliability in quantitative studies, focusing on the consistency of the data collection and analysis processes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To enhance dependability, the researcher employed several strategies. First, the interviews were audio-taped to provide a verbatim account of the respondents' responses. This approach allowed for accurate and consistent data recording, which is crucial for ensuring that the findings reflect the actual responses of the participants (Silverman, 2013).

Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy. This process involved replaying the recordings to ensure that the transcriptions accurately captured the interviewee's responses. By checking the transcriptions against the original recordings, the researcher could identify and correct any discrepancies, thereby increasing the dependability of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings, ensuring that the results genuinely reflect the perspectives and experiences of the participants. It is a key component of trustworthiness in qualitative research and

is achieved through various strategies, including member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study, credibility was established through member checking, which involved giving the interviewees an opportunity to review their interview transcriptions. This approach allowed participants to verify the accuracy of their responses and make any necessary corrections or clarifications. By allowing participants to review and validate the transcriptions, the researcher ensured that the data accurately represented the participants' perspectives and experiences, thus enhancing the credibility of the findings (Maxwell, 2013).

Additionally, the use of a structured interview guide, which provided a clear and consistent framework for the interviews, contributed to the credibility of the study. The guide was designed to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions in the same manner, which helped in maintaining consistency and reducing potential biases (Patton, 2002). This structured approach allowed for a systematic and rigorous exploration of the research questions, further supporting the credibility of the results. The choice of dependability and credibility as trustworthiness criteria was guided by their relevance to the goals of qualitative research. Dependability ensures that the data collection and analysis processes are consistent and replicable, while credibility ensures that the findings accurately reflect the participants' views and experiences (Nowell et al, 2017). These criteria are essential for establishing the validity of qualitative research findings and for making sure that the results are reliable and applicable in real-world contexts.

3.12 Data Collection Procedures

To commence the data collection process, an introductory letter was secured from the Early Childhood Education Department to facilitate the study. Prior to distributing the data collection instruments, permission was obtained from the Nanumba North Municipal Education Directorate, headteachers, and other relevant authorities to authorize the data collection. Upon arriving at each school, the researcher sought the consent of the participants by explaining the purpose of the study and its educational significance.

For the quantitative data, a census method was used to collect data from all 100 kindergarten teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality. The data collection instruments, such as the questionnaire, were distributed after obtaining consent from the participants. The researcher provided a clear explanation of the study's purpose and educational significance to ensure that participants understood their involvement. Completed questionnaires were then collected and analyzed to generate the quantitative data.

In the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was employed to select 5 kindergarten headteachers who were seen as having the relevant knowledge and experience. The researcher sought their consent before conducting interviews. During these interviews, the headteachers were asked open-ended questions to gather in-depth insights into the educational context and challenges within the municipality. The qualitative data was collected through these interviews and then analyzed to complement the quantitative findings.

This combination of census sampling for the quantitative data and purposive sampling for the qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research

topic, with both data types enriching the findings and providing a more complete picture of the study's objectives.

3.13 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The responses were coded and entered into Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 25.0, where they were analyzed using measures such as percentages, means, and standard deviations. For qualitative data analysis, as noted by Creswell (2008), a thematic approach was employed. This method shifts from merely reporting facts to interpreting the behaviors and activities of individuals. The recorded interview data were transcribed, coded, and examined to identify relationships. From these relationships, themes were developed for further discussion.

3.14 Ethical Issues

To uphold ethical standards in this study, several key concerns were addressed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining confidentiality.

Informed consent was obtained to give participants the chance to decide whether or not to participate in the research. This process involved clearly explaining the study's aims, objectives, and any potential risks associated with participation (Seidman, 2016). Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose before they agreed to take part.

Anonymity was a crucial consideration in this study. As emphasized by Gujarati (2013), maintaining anonymity is essential to protect participants' identities. To ensure this, pseudonyms were used for participants, and codes were assigned where

necessary to keep personal information secure and anonymous. Prior to data collection, the researcher visited the schools to explain the study's purpose and reassure participants about their privacy. No identifying details were collected, thereby preventing any potential victimization related to sensitive responses.

Confidentiality was also strictly observed. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one outside the research team would have access to their information. No names or identifiable information were recorded to protect participants' privacy. Additionally, all sources referenced in the study were properly cited to maintain academic integrity and avoid plagiarism.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

This chapter comprises the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the data of the study based on the responses from teachers' use of guided play in Early Grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The analysis and interpretation were carried out based on the results of the four (4) research questions formulated to guide the study. The first part of this chapter describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Kindergarten teachers). The obtained data on the demographics were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. In the second part, the research findings were presented based on the research questions formulated for the study.

4.1 Background Information of Respondents

This section deals with the analysis of pertinent issues related to the respondents' demographic characteristics. These include distribution of respondents by gender, age distribution, area of specialization, rank in GES, and number of years serving as a Kindergarten teacher.

Table 4.1: Background Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	40	40.0
Female	60	60.0
Total	100	100.0
Age		
21-30 years	20	20.0
31-40 years	25	25.0
41-50 years	30	30.0
51-60 years	25	25.0
Total	100	100.0
Area of Specialization		
Early Childhood Education	70	70.0
Basic Education	30	30.0
Total	100	100.0
Qualification		
Certificate	10	10.0
Diploma	20	20.0
First Degree	40	40.0
Master's Degree	30	30.0
Total	100	100.0
Rank in GES		
Superintendent I	15	15.0
Superintendent II	20	20.0
Senior Superintendent II	25	25.0
Senior Superintendent I	10	10.0
Principal Superintendent	5	5.0
Assistant Director II	10	10.0
Assistant Director I	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0
Years in Service		
0-5 years	20	20.0
6-10 years	30	30.0
11-15 years	25	25.0
16-20 years	15	15.0
21 years and above	10	10.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.1 provides a detailed analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study on the use of guided play in early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. The data focuses on gender, age distribution, area of specialization, qualifications, rank within the Ghana Education Service (GES), and years of service.

The gender distribution of the respondents indicates a significant imbalance, with 60% (60 respondents) being female and 40% (40 respondents) male. This reflects a common trend within the teaching profession in Ghana, where female educators tend to outnumber their male counterparts, particularly in the early childhood education sector. This gender distribution could have implications for the types of teaching practices employed, including the use of guided play, and may also reflect broader societal trends regarding gender roles within education.

In terms of age distribution, the respondents are fairly evenly spread across different age groups, which provides a well-rounded perspective on the use of guided play. The largest group, comprising 30% (30 respondents), falls within the 41-50 years age range, which suggests a solid level of experience in the teaching profession. Meanwhile, 25% (25 respondents) are aged between 31 and 40 years, another 25% (25 respondents) are between 51 and 60 years, and 20% (20 respondents) are in the 21-30 years age group. This diverse age range ensures that the study captures the views of both younger, potentially more innovative teachers and older, more experienced ones. This mix of age groups is important as it introduces a variety of teaching perspectives and experiences related to guided play, potentially influenced by different generational approaches to education.

The area of specialization among the respondents further highlights the focus of the study on early childhood education. A clear majority, 70% (70 respondents), specialize in Early Childhood Education, while 30% (30 respondents) have a background in Basic Education. This specialization is particularly relevant as it aligns with the research's aim of investigating guided play in early grade settings. Teachers specializing in early childhood education are more likely to possess the necessary skills and theoretical understanding to implement guided play effectively, making their responses particularly pertinent to the study.

Regarding educational qualifications, the respondents show a broad spectrum of academic backgrounds, which further enriches the data. Ten percent (10 respondents) hold a Certificate, 20% (20 respondents) have a Diploma, 40% (40 respondents) possess a First Degree, and 30% (30 respondents) hold a Master's Degree. This educational distribution underscores the highly educated nature of the sample, with a significant portion of respondents holding advanced qualifications. The higher levels of education among the teachers suggest that they may have a deeper understanding of modern pedagogical approaches, including the potential benefits and challenges of guided play.

The rank distribution within the Ghana Education Service (GES) provides insights into the hierarchical structure and the varied levels of authority among the respondents. Fifteen percent (15 respondents) hold the rank of Superintendent I, 20% (20 respondents) are Superintendent II, 25% (25 respondents) are Senior Superintendent II, 10% (10 respondents) are Senior Superintendent I, and 5% (5 respondents) hold the rank of Principal Superintendent. Additionally, 10% (10 respondents) are Assistant Director II, and 15% (15 respondents) are Assistant

Director I. This wide range of ranks indicates that the study gathered input from teachers across various levels of authority, from those at the classroom level to those in senior management roles within the education system. These varied perspectives are essential for understanding how guided play is implemented at different levels and how it might be influenced by the broader organizational structure of the educational system.

Finally, the years of service among the respondents reveal a range of experience, which is likely to impact their attitudes toward the use of guided play. Twenty percent (20 respondents) have 0-5 years of service, suggesting that some teachers are relatively new to the profession. Thirty percent (30 respondents) have 6-10 years of service, and 25% (25 respondents) have between 11 and 15 years of experience, indicating a good level of mid-career educators. Additionally, 15% (15 respondents) have 16-20 years of service, and 10% (10 respondents) have more than 21 years of service, representing the more seasoned educators. This mix of novice and experienced teachers provides a broad range of insights into the implementation of guided play, as different levels of experience are likely to shape their views on the practice and its effectiveness.

Quantitative Findings

4.2 Research Question One: What are the views of early grade teachers regarding the use of guided play in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana?

This research question sought to determine the attitudes and views of early grade teachers toward the use of guided play in classroom instruction. A Likert scale was employed to quantify respondents' views, with the following scoring system: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), and 4 = Strongly Agree

(SA). This approach allowed for the measurement of teachers' views regarding the importance, usefulness, and challenges associated with guided play.

Table 4.2: Views of early grade teachers regarding the use of guided play

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
I believe guided play enhances children's cognitive development.	50	40	8	2	3.38	0.73
Guided play improves children's social skills and emotional development.	45	42	10	3	3.30	0.78
I am confident in using guided play in my classroom.	40	35	18	7	3.00	0.92
Availability of teaching and learning materials affects my use of guided play.	60	30	7	3	3.47	0.73
Teacher training has prepared me to implement guided play effectively.	35	40	15	10	3.00	0.91
Guided play increases learners' motivation and engagement in class.	48	38	10	4	3.32	0.80
Large class sizes limit my ability to implement guided play.	55	30	10	5	3.35	0.84
Curriculum guidelines provide clear direction for using guided play.	30	40	20	10	2.90	0.95
Guided play supports collaborative and peer learning among children.	50	38	8	4	3.34	0.78
Support from school leadership influences my use of guided play.	42	40	12	6	3.16	0.86

NB: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation

The data in Table 4.2 present early grade teachers' views regarding the use of guided play in classrooms within the Nanumba North Municipality. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers recognized the educational benefits of guided play, although certain constraints influenced its implementation.

The majority of respondents strongly agreed that guided play enhances children's cognitive development (mean = 3.38, SD = 0.73) and improves social and emotional skills (mean = 3.30, SD = 0.78). Similarly, teachers acknowledged that guided play supports collaborative learning and peer interaction, with a mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.78. These results demonstrate that teachers generally valued guided play as a strategy that fosters holistic development, consistent with literature emphasizing its role in cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

Teachers' confidence in using guided play and the perceived effectiveness of prior training were moderate, with mean scores of 3.00 (SD = 0.92) and 3.00 (SD = 0.91), respectively. This suggests that while teachers appreciated the concept of guided play, gaps in skills and practical training might limit their ability to implement it effectively.

Availability of teaching and learning materials emerged as a critical factor, with the highest mean score of 3.47 (SD = 0.73), indicating that resource access strongly influenced the use of guided play. Large class sizes were also identified as a constraint (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.84), reflecting challenges in managing play-based activities in crowded classrooms.

Curriculum guidance received relatively lower ratings (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.95), suggesting that teachers perceived official directives as insufficiently clear for supporting guided play implementation. Support from school leadership scored a mean of 3.16 (SD = 0.86), indicating that administrative encouragement moderately affected teachers' use of guided play.

The findings reveal that teachers appreciated the developmental value of guided play but were constrained by limited materials, class size, training, and unclear curriculum guidelines. These insights highlight areas for targeted interventions, including professional development, resource provision, and curriculum clarification, to enhance guided play practices in early grade classrooms.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews provided in-depth insights into teachers' experiences, views, and challenges regarding the use of guided play in early grade classrooms. The findings were organized into three main themes based on recurring patterns in the responses.

Theme 1: Perceived Benefits of Guided Play

Many teachers emphasized the positive impact of guided play on children's learning and engagement. For instance, a teacher stated

> ―Guided play allows children to explore concepts at their own pace, encouraging curiosity and independent thinking, while I provide guidance to focus their attention on key learning points, ensuring they achieve meaningful understanding and develop essential skills." (HTR 8, interviewed data,2024)

Similarly, Teacher 3 remarked:

> ―Children become more motivated and engaged when lessons involve play, as guided play allows them to interact, experiment, and collaborate with peers, while I guide their thinking to ensure that learning objectives are met effectively." (HTR 3, interview data, 2024)

Another teacher shared:

> –Guided play provides opportunities for children to apply what they have learned in a hands-on, interactive way, allowing me to observe their progress and offer timely support, which strengthens understanding and fosters both cognitive and social skills." (HTR 5, interview data, 2024)

The responses indicated that teachers recognized guided play as a valuable pedagogical strategy that enhances children's engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. They emphasized that it allowed learners to explore concepts independently while benefiting from teacher guidance, fostering both cognitive growth and social development, and enabling educators to monitor progress, provide support, and ensure that learning objectives were effectively achieved in early grade classrooms.

Theme 2: Challenges in Implementing Guided Play

Teachers highlighted several challenges that hindered the effective implementation of guided play in early grade classrooms. These challenges included limited teaching and learning materials, large class sizes, and insufficient training.

Teacher 6 shared:

> –Sometimes it is difficult to carry out guided play because we lack enough materials like blocks, storybooks, and manipulatives, which limits the children's ability to explore and learn effectively." (HTR 6, interview data, 2024)

Teacher 9 stated:

> –Managing large classes during play-based activities is challenging. It becomes hard to provide individualized guidance and ensure every child participates meaningfully." (HTR 9, interview data, 2024)

Teacher 2 noted:

> "Many teachers, including myself, have not received sufficient professional development on guided play. This affects our confidence and the quality of play experiences we can provide." (HTR 2, interview data, 2024)

These responses implied that while teachers understood the benefits of guided play, systemic and logistical constraints limited its consistent application. Factors such as inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, and gaps in professional training reduced teachers' ability to implement guided play effectively.

Theme 3: Support and Professional Development Needs

Teachers emphasized the importance of ongoing support, mentorship, and targeted professional development to enhance their capacity to implement guided play effectively. They highlighted that structured training, access to resources, and administrative support were essential for sustaining play-based instructional practices.

Teacher 4 shared:

> "Regular workshops and training sessions would help me understand new strategies for guided play and improve my confidence in facilitating learning experiences that are both fun and educational." (HTR 4, interview data, 2024)

Teacher 7 stated:

> "Having guidance from experienced colleagues and school leaders makes it easier to plan and execute play-based lessons. Peer support and mentoring are critical for learning how to scaffold children's play effectively." (HTR 7, interview data, 2024)

Teacher 1 noted:

> "Access to relevant teaching materials and professional advice would significantly improve the quality of guided play in my classroom. Without these supports, it is difficult to maintain consistent and meaningful play experiences for children." (HTR 1, interview data, 2024)

These responses indicated that teachers valued professional development and institutional support as key enablers of guided play. They suggested that structured workshops, mentoring programs, and provision of adequate teaching resources would enhance their skills, boost confidence, and allow them to implement guided play more consistently, ultimately improving children's learning outcomes and engagement in early grade classrooms.

4.3 Research Question 2: To what extent are teaching and learning materials that support guided play available in early grade settings?

The table below presents data on the availability and use of teaching and learning materials for guided play in early grade centres in the Nanumba North Municipal. Read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (√): 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 4.3: Teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade settings

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teachers have access to local resources to create improvised play materials.	12	20	50	18	2.74	0.89
Visual learning materials are available.	11	19	50	20	2.78	0.89
Auditory learning materials are available.	12	18	48	22	2.80	0.88
Tactile learning materials are available.	10	20	52	18	2.78	0.86
Materials used during guided play promote creativity and exploration.	5	10	65	20	3.00	0.71
Teaching and learning materials are easily accessible to both teachers and learners.	8	15	55	22	2.92	0.80
Materials for guided play are durable and regularly maintained.	15	25	40	20	2.65	0.96
Availability of Developmentally Appropriate Teaching and Learning Materials for Guided Play.	5	10	60	25	3.05	0.74
Availability of materials that encourage collaborative and social interaction among learners.	7	12	58	23	2.97	0.78
Materials are available in adequate quantity to support all children in the class.	10	18	50	22	2.84	0.85

Source: Field Data, 2024
NB: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation

Quantitative Analysis

Table 4.3 shows teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade settings, with interpretation based on the reported means and standard deviations.

The availability of developmentally appropriate teaching and learning materials recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.05, SD = 0.74), indicating strong agreement

among teachers that such materials are present, with relatively low variation in responses. Similarly, materials used during guided play were seen to promote creativity and exploration (M = 3.00, SD = 0.71), suggesting a consistent positive perception across respondents. Materials that encourage collaborative and social interaction also recorded a high mean (M = 2.97, SD = 0.78), reflecting general agreement that guided play supports social learning.

Accessibility of materials to both teachers and learners had a mean score of 2.92 (SD = 0.80), indicating that materials are largely accessible, although responses varied moderately. The availability of materials in adequate quantities to support all children recorded a mean of 2.84 (SD = 0.85), suggesting moderate agreement but with noticeable differences in teachers' experiences across schools.

With respect to sensory materials, visual learning materials (M = 2.78, SD = 0.89), auditory materials (M = 2.80, SD = 0.88), and tactile materials (M = 2.78, SD = 0.86) all showed similar mean scores, indicating moderate agreement on their availability. The standard deviations close to 0.90 suggest some variability in availability across classrooms. Teachers' access to local resources for improvising play materials also showed moderate agreement (M = 2.74, SD = 0.89), pointing to uneven access to such resources.

The lowest mean score was recorded for the durability and regular maintenance of guided play materials (M = 2.65, SD = 0.96). The relatively high standard deviation indicates considerable variation in teachers' views, suggesting that while some schools maintain materials well, others face challenges.

The means indicate that teachers generally agree that teaching and learning materials for guided play are available and supportive of learning, particularly in terms of developmental appropriateness, creativity, and social interaction. However, the standard deviations reveal variability across schools, especially regarding durability, maintenance, and access to local and sensory materials.

Qualitative Findings

To validate and enrich the quantitative findings presented in the previous section, interviews were conducted with head teachers of early childhood centres within the Nanumba North Municipal. Their perspectives provided deeper insights into the availability, adequacy, and use of teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade classrooms. From their responses, four key themes emerged:

Theme 1: Availability of Learning Resources

Several head teachers acknowledged the presence of basic play materials in their schools but noted that these resources were often limited in variety and quantity. One headteacher shared:

> ―We have some toys and learning aids, but they are not enough to support all the different types of play activities we want to implement. Sometimes we have to improvise using local materials.‖ (HTR 8, Interview Data, 2024)

Another headteacher added:

> ―We mainly have plastic items and a few storybooks, but we lack puzzles, building blocks, and other hands-on materials that allow for different forms of play. It restricts how much we can do with the learners.‖ (HTR 3, Interview Data, 2024)

These responses indicate that while basic materials for guided play are present in early grade settings, they are often limited in variety and quantity, requiring teachers

to improvise with local or recycled items, which affects the quality and effectiveness of learning.

Theme 2: Age-Appropriateness and Cultural Relevance

Head teachers emphasized the importance of using materials that align with the developmental stages and cultural backgrounds of learners. While some reported having age-appropriate materials, others noted significant gaps. One headteacher remarked:

> "Most of the materials we have are foreign and not always suitable for the age or cultural context of our learners. Children relate better when the materials reflect what they see at home or in the community." (HTR 2, Interview Data, 2024)

Another commented:

> "We try to ensure that what we use in class matches the children's level, but we often lack culturally relevant items, especially ones that reflect local languages, traditions, or familiar objects." (HTR 6, Interview Data, 2024)

These responses reinforce the concern that, although some materials meet developmental needs, many lack cultural relevance. The absence of locally contextualized content reduces children's connection to learning activities, potentially hindering their comprehension and engagement during guided play.

Theme 3: Maintenance and Replacement Challenges

Head teachers highlighted ongoing difficulties in maintaining and replacing teaching and learning materials used for guided play. Many of the materials, once provided, are rarely updated or repaired, which affects their usability over time. One headteacher shared:

> —We do not have a proper system for repairing or replacing damaged play items. Once something breaks, it may take months or even years to get a new one—if at all." (HTR 1, Interview Data, 2024)

Another headteacher added:

> —Children use these materials daily, so wear and tear is expected. Unfortunately, we don't get enough support to keep them in good condition. Some classrooms are using broken toys or outdated materials." (HTR 9, Interview Data, 2024)

These insights underscore a key operational gap—while schools strive to provide guided play resources, the lack of regular maintenance and structured replacement procedures hampers their long-term effectiveness and availability.

Theme 4: Impact on Learner Engagement and Creativity

Head teachers observed that the availability, quality, and relevance of guided play materials significantly influence learners' engagement levels and creative expression in the classroom. When materials are adequate and stimulating, children are more enthusiastic and involved in activities. One headteacher commented:

> —Whenever we introduce new or interactive materials, the children become more active, eager to explore, and participate. It really boosts their creativity and excitement for learning." (HTR 6, Interview Data, 2024)

Another noted:

> —Lack of proper materials makes it hard to sustain the interest of learners. They get bored easily when we keep using the same toys or activities repeatedly." (HTR 5, Interview Data, 2024)

These reflections affirm that guided play materials not only serve educational purposes but also play a vital role in fostering learner motivation, imagination, and

social interaction. Limited or monotonous resources can dampen enthusiasm, thereby reducing the effectiveness of play-based learning strategies.

Overall the findings suggest that guided play in early grade settings within Nanumba North Municipal is moderately supported by teaching and learning materials. While materials are generally developmentally appropriate, creativity-enhancing, and socially engaging, challenges remain in terms of quantity, accessibility, cultural relevance, and durability. Addressing these gaps through improved resource provision, regular maintenance, and incorporation of locally contextualized content would enhance the effectiveness of guided play and maximize its impact on learner engagement and creativity.

4.3 Research Question 3: How does teacher training impact the use of guided play in early grade classrooms?

The table below presents responses on how teacher training influences the use of guided play in early grade classrooms. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement by ticking (√): 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 4.4: Teacher Training Impact on the Use of Guided Play

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teacher training has improved my understanding of guided play principles.	5	10	50	35	3.15	0.79
Training programs have enhanced my ability to design play-based activities.	7	12	45	36	3.10	0.82
Professional development sessions provided practical strategies for implementing guided play.	6	15	48	31	3.01	0.81
Training has increased my confidence in facilitating guided play in the classroom.	8	20	42	30	2.92	0.85
Workshops helped me understand the developmental benefits of guided play.	4	12	50	34	3.18	0.77
Continuous training influences my regular use of guided play activities.	10	18	40	32	2.96	0.88
Training has equipped me to manage large classes during guided play sessions.	12	25	38	25	2.76	0.92
Teacher training emphasized the importance of cultural relevance in guided play materials.	5	15	50	30	3.06	0.80
Mentorship and follow-up support after training sessions improved my play facilitation skills.	6	18	45	31	2.97	0.83
Training encouraged collaboration among teachers to enhance guided play practices.	7	12	48	33	3.07	0.81

Source: Field Data, 2024
NB: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation

The data presented in Table 4.4 provides insights into the extent to which teacher training influenced the use of guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores and standard deviations reflect both the overall level of agreement and the variability of responses among the 100 teachers surveyed.

Overall, the findings indicate that teacher training had a moderate to high impact on teachers' understanding, confidence, and implementation of guided play. The highest mean score (3.18) was observed for the statement, "Workshops helped me understand the developmental benefits of guided play," suggesting that teachers largely agreed that training sessions effectively conveyed the importance of guided play for cognitive and social development. Similarly, the statements regarding improvement in understanding guided play principles (mean = 3.15) and enhanced ability to design play-based activities (mean = 3.10) reflect positive views of the practical benefits of professional development.

However, some challenges were apparent. Statements related to managing large classes during guided play sessions (mean = 2.76) and increased confidence in facilitation (mean = 2.92) recorded relatively lower scores, indicating that while training improved knowledge and skills, contextual factors such as class size and limited ongoing support constrained the full application of guided play strategies. The mean standard deviations, ranging from 0.77 to 0.92, suggest moderate variability in teachers' views, which may reflect differences in prior experience, school resources, or access to follow-up support.

The table demonstrates that teacher training positively influenced knowledge, planning, and collaborative practices related to guided play, but additional support, mentoring, and strategies for overcoming contextual challenges are necessary to maximize its implementation in early grade classrooms.

Qualitative Findings

To enrich and validate the quantitative data, interviews were conducted with head teachers from early childhood centers. Their responses highlighted several key themes regarding teacher training and its impact on guided play:

Theme 1: Adequacy and Nature of Training

Many head teachers acknowledged that while workshops and in-service training on guided play exist, the coverage during pre-service education is limited. One headteacher shared,

> "Most of our teachers learn about guided play after joining the service, mainly through short workshops. The pre-service training does not prepare them adequately." (HTR 3, Interview Data, 2024)

Another headteacher said:

> "There is little emphasis on play-based methods during teacher training college. So when they arrive here, we have to rely on in-service workshops to build their understanding. It delays the full adoption of guided play in our classrooms." (HTR 1, Interview Data, 2024)

These responses suggest that although in-service training offers some support, the foundational teacher preparation programs lack a structured focus on guided play pedagogy. As a result, teachers often enter the profession without sufficient exposure to or practice with this instructional approach, necessitating remedial training later in their careers.

Theme 2: Impact on Teaching Practices

Headteachers generally agreed that training—particularly when practical and hands-on—had a noticeable impact on teachers' instructional approaches. Those who

received structured support in guided play methods were more likely to integrate play into their lesson delivery effectively. One headteacher explained:

> "Teachers who have attended workshops on guided play show more creativity and flexibility in class. They use games, storytelling, and learner-led activities to support academic goals." (HTR 5, Interview Data, 2024)

Another added:

> "Before the training, some teachers thought play was just free time. But now, they are more intentional—linking play to learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy." (HTR 2, Interview Data, 2024)

Similarly, another headteacher shared:

> "After participating in guided play training, my teachers started planning their lessons differently. They now set clear objectives for each play activity and know how to scaffold learning through play. It has made a big difference in how learners engage." (HTR 4, Interview Data, 2024)

These comments collectively illustrate that effective teacher training transforms guided play from an incidental activity into a structured, outcome-driven teaching strategy. Teachers who have received proper training exhibit a better understanding of how to balance playfulness with curriculum goals, making learning both enjoyable and meaningful for early grade learners. This shift in practice ultimately supports more holistic child development and improves classroom dynamics.

Theme 3: Professional Development Opportunities

While some opportunities for professional development are available, there was a consensus that these are irregular and insufficiently tailored. One headteacher remarked,

> "Ongoing coaching is rare, and not all teachers get the chance to observe model lessons, which limits their growth." (HTR 4, Interview Data, 2024)

Another added:

> "Workshops happen maybe once or twice a year, and sometimes only a few teachers can attend due to budget or scheduling issues. There's no consistent follow-up or mentoring afterwards." (HTR 6, Interview Data, 2024)

Similarly, a headteacher said:

> "Even when training sessions are organized, they are often too general. We need targeted sessions that address the realities of early grade classrooms and provide practical, hands-on strategies for guided play." (HTR 2, Interview Data, 2024)

These reflections underscore the need for sustained, context-specific professional development that supports the effective use of guided play. Without regular, focused opportunities for learning and reflection, teachers may revert to traditional, didactic methods. Professional growth is most effective when it includes mentorship, peer collaboration, classroom demonstrations, and timely feedback—all of which are currently limited or inconsistent.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Improvement

Headteachers offered several practical suggestions to enhance teacher training on guided play, emphasizing the need for both structural changes and resource allocation. A recurring recommendation was the integration of guided play into pre-service teacher education curricula. One headteacher noted:

> "Colleges of education should include guided play as a core component of early childhood training. This would ensure that teachers graduate with both the knowledge and skills to implement it." (HTR 1, Interview Data, 2024)

Another added:

> "Instead of one-off workshops, we need continuous professional development—maybe termly coaching sessions—where experienced

> facilitators can support teachers in their own classrooms." (HTR 5, Interview Data, 2024)

Another also added:

> "Creating learning communities within schools where teachers can share experiences, demonstrate lessons, and solve problems together would make a big difference." (HTR 3, Interview Data, 2024)

Lastly, a headteacher said:

> "The district and national education authorities must prioritize play-based learning by allocating resources, training facilitators, and monitoring implementation through school visits and support systems." (HTR 6, Interview Data, 2024)

These insights suggest that for guided play to be effectively embedded in early grade classrooms, teacher training must be restructured to start from pre-service preparation, reinforced by ongoing, context-specific in-service professional development, and supported through mentorship and systemic backing from educational stakeholders.

4.4 Research Question 4: What role do curriculum guidelines play in shaping the implementation of guided play in early grade education?

This section gathers views on how the curriculum supports or limits the implementation of guided play in early grade settings. 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 4.5: Curriculum Guidelines and Their Role in Shaping Guided Play

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The curriculum clearly includes guided play as a teaching strategy.	10	30	40	20	2.70	0.89
Learning objectives are aligned with guided play activities.	8	24	48	20	2.80	0.86
Curriculum documents provide examples of guided play activities.	12	34	38	16	2.58	0.90
The curriculum encourages learner-centred approaches like guided play.	6	18	52	24	2.94	0.81
Teachers are given flexibility within the curriculum to implement guided play.	10	26	44	20	2.74	0.87
Curriculum guidelines are supported by appropriate assessment tools.	18	30	36	16	2.50	0.93
Curriculum requirements allow sufficient time for guided play activities.	20	32	34	14	2.42	0.95
The curriculum promotes integration of guided play with core subjects.	10	22	48	20	2.78	0.86
Teachers are oriented on how to interpret the curriculum for guided play.	16	28	38	18	2.58	0.91
The curriculum recognizes the developmental benefits of guided play.	6	16	54	24	2.96	0.79
Means of mean/Std					**2.70**	**0.88**

Source: Field Data, 2024
NB: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation

The data in Table 4.5 provides a quantitative overview of teachers' views regarding the role of curriculum guidelines in shaping the implementation of guided play in early grade education. The responses, collected from a sample size of 100 participants, reveal a moderate level of agreement across most statements, with a mean of means of 2.70 and an overall standard deviation of 0.88. This indicates that while many respondents generally agree that the curriculum supports guided play, there is some variation in opinion.

The highest level of agreement is observed in the statement –The curriculum recognizes the developmental benefits of guided play," which recorded a mean of 2.96 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.79. This suggests a strong consensus among respondents that the curriculum acknowledges the importance of guided play for children's development. Similarly, the statement –The curriculum encourages learner-centred approaches like guided play" received a mean of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.81, indicating a broad agreement that the curriculum promotes modern, child-centred pedagogical strategies.

Conversely, statements concerning the practical aspects of implementing guided play, such as –Curriculum requirements allow sufficient time for guided play activities," scored the lowest mean of 2.42 and the highest standard deviation of 0.95. This highlights significant concerns about time constraints and inconsistency in how much time the curriculum allocates for guided play, with opinions more varied among respondents. Similarly, the statement –Curriculum guidelines are supported by appropriate assessment tools" had a low mean of 2.50 and a relatively high standard deviation of 0.93, indicating that many teachers perceive a lack of adequate assessment mechanisms to evaluate guided play outcomes effectively.

Flexibility within the curriculum to implement guided play was perceived moderately positively, with a mean score of 2.74 and a standard deviation of 0.87, showing some agreement but also room for improvement. Meanwhile, –Teachers are oriented on how to interpret the curriculum for guided play" received a mean of 2.58 and a standard deviation of 0.91, reflecting a view that insufficient training or guidance is provided for educators to apply the curriculum effectively in this context.

Statements regarding the alignment of learning objectives with guided play activities and the provision of curriculum examples also showed moderate agreement, with means of 2.80 and 2.58 respectively, and standard deviations close to 0.86-0.90, indicating fairly consistent views but some uncertainty.

In summary, the mean scores around 2.70 and standard deviations averaging 0.88 reflect a general but cautious endorsement of the curriculum's role in promoting guided play. The curriculum is recognized for its developmental emphasis and learner-centred approach, yet practical challenges such as limited time allocation, insufficient assessment tools, and inadequate teacher orientation persist. These findings suggest the need for curriculum developers to enhance clarity, flexibility, and support mechanisms to ensure that guided play is not only included in policy but is also realistically and effectively integrated into classroom practice.

Qualitative Data

To further explore these findings, interviews were conducted with headteachers in early childhood centres. Their responses offer deeper insights into how curriculum guidelines influence guided play implementation on the ground.

The following themes emerged from their responses:

Theme 1: Clarity and Practicality of Curriculum Guidelines

Several headteachers expressed concerns about the clarity and practical nature of the curriculum guidelines relating to guided play. While the curriculum often mentions guided play as an important teaching strategy, it lacks detailed examples and clear instructions that can be easily applied in classroom settings.

A headteacher shared:

> "The curriculum acknowledges guided play as a strategy, but it is usually very general. It does not provide specific activities or step-by-step guidance, making it difficult for teachers to translate it into daily lessons effectively." (HTR 4, Interview Data, 2024)

Another headteacher added:

> "Sometimes the language in the curriculum is too technical or vague, which confuses teachers, especially those with less training. They need clear, practical guidelines that fit the realities of our classrooms." (HTR 7, Interview Data, 2024)

Similarly, another teacher shared:

> "The curriculum could be more user-friendly. Many teachers struggle to understand how to adapt guided play within their limited resources and large class sizes. Practical examples and simple language would make a big difference." (HTR 3, Interview Data, 2024)

The responses indicated that while the curriculum supports guided play conceptually, its lack of detailed, practical guidance and the use of technical language create challenges for teachers. Many educators find it difficult to apply the guidelines effectively, especially in resource-constrained classrooms, highlighting the need for clearer, more accessible curriculum materials with concrete examples tailored to real classroom conditions.

Theme 2: Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Several headteachers highlighted the critical role of teacher training and ongoing professional development in successfully implementing guided play. They noted that many teachers feel unprepared to integrate guided play effectively due to limited training opportunities focused specifically on this approach.

One headteacher remarked:

> "Without adequate training on guided play, teachers often rely on traditional methods. Professional development workshops that focus on practical skills and techniques for guided play are essential." (HTR 2, Interview Data, 2024)

Another headteacher added:

> "Continuous support and refresher courses help teachers stay confident and creative in applying guided play, especially as classroom dynamics and resources change." (HTR 5, Interview Data, 2024)

These responses underscore the need for targeted professional development programs to enhance teacher readiness and capacity to implement guided play effectively.

Theme 3: Time and Resource Constraints

Headteachers frequently identified time limitations and scarce resources as significant barriers to implementing guided play in early grade classrooms. Many noted that tight schedules and heavy curricular demands leave little room for extended play activities. Additionally, inadequate teaching materials and large class sizes further restrict teachers' ability to effectively facilitate guided play.

One headteacher explained:

> "Teachers struggle to find enough time for guided play because the curriculum is packed, and assessments take priority. This leaves guided play sidelined despite its benefits." (HTR 6, Interview Data, 2024)

Another shared:

> "Limited resources like toys, learning corners, and play materials mean teachers have to be very creative, but this is not always possible, especially with many pupils." (HTR 1, Interview Data, 2024)

These insights highlight the need for curriculum adjustments and resource allocation to better support guided play within practical classroom constraints.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Curriculum Improvement

Headteachers offered several suggestions to enhance curriculum guidelines and better support guided play implementation. They emphasized the need for clearer, more detailed curriculum documents that include practical examples and step-by-step instructions tailored to classroom realities. Many recommended integrating specific training modules on guided play into teacher professional development programs. Additionally, they called for increased allocation of time within the curriculum for guided play activities and provision of appropriate resources to facilitate its delivery.

One headteacher recommended:

> "The curriculum should provide concrete examples and lesson plans for guided play. This will help teachers understand how to plan and execute activities effectively." (HTR 8, Interview Data, 2024)

Another added:

> "More focus should be placed on equipping teachers through ongoing training and supplying materials that make guided play feasible, even in large classes." (HTR 9, Interview Data, 2024)

Similarly, a headteacher said:

> "To improve implementation, the curriculum must be flexible enough to allow teachers to adapt guided play to their unique classroom settings. Providing practical resources and reducing the pressure of rigid assessments would encourage more creative use of play in learning." (HTR 5, Interview Data, 2024)

The responses indicated that clearer, more practical curriculum guidelines, targeted teacher training, increased time allocation, and better resource provision are essential for effective guided play implementation. Flexibility in curriculum design is also crucial to accommodate diverse classroom needs and encourage creativity.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What are the views of early grade teachers regarding the use of guided play in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana?

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality held generally positive views about guided play, recognizing its value in promoting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Quantitative results showed that the majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that guided play enhances cognitive development (mean = 3.38) and improves social skills and motivation (mean = 3.30–3.32). Similarly, the qualitative interviews revealed that teachers appreciated the flexibility of guided play, allowing learners to explore concepts independently while receiving targeted guidance to meet learning objectives. Teachers emphasized that guided play promoted curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration, and engagement, echoing findings from Abdulai and Batimah (2018), who reported that kindergarten teachers in Ghana perceived guided play as a strategy that encourages active participation and holistic development.

These results also aligned with international research. For example, Bodrova and Leong (2015) emphasized that guided play supports cognitive and socio-emotional development when teachers scaffold children's interactions within a structured yet flexible learning environment. The teachers' recognition of guided play's benefits reflects Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which posits that children learn effectively through socially mediated activities where adults scaffold learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (Moll, 2014). Similarly, Kekesi, Donkor, and Torkonyo (2019) found that teachers value play-based strategies for fostering engagement and peer collaboration, suggesting that positive views are associated with more frequent implementation of guided play in early childhood classrooms.

However, the findings also revealed some constraints, such as limited resources and challenges in large classes, which mirror concerns raised by Akyeampong et al. (2013) and Agyeman and Agyei (2019). While teachers appreciated guided play's pedagogical benefits, structural limitations occasionally hindered its effective use, highlighting the need for targeted professional development, provision of adequate teaching materials, and supportive policies to maximize guided play in early grade settings.

The study demonstrated that teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality valued guided play and understood its potential to enhance learning outcomes. These views were consistent with both local and international literature, confirming that teacher recognition and positive attitudes are critical for the successful implementation of guided play in early childhood education.

Research Question 2: To what extent are teaching and learning materials that support guided play available in early grade settings?

The findings on the availability and use of teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade settings reveal a complex reality, reflecting both progress and ongoing challenges in the Nanumba North Municipal. Quantitative data indicates a moderate presence of play materials, with teachers acknowledging that while materials are somewhat sufficient and age-appropriate, issues of variety, maintenance, and cultural relevance remain. This finding aligns with Agyeman and Agyei (2019), who highlight that in many rural Ghanaian classrooms, although some materials exist, their quantity and diversity are often inadequate to fully support effective early childhood pedagogy. The limited variety of materials restricts the range of play experiences, which is critical for comprehensive child development.

The qualitative insights from head teachers emphasize improvisation using local materials due to shortages of formal resources, a practice supported by Asare and Mensah (2021), who argue that local resourcefulness is vital in overcoming material deficits in early childhood education in Ghana. Their work stresses the value of integrating culturally relevant and locally sourced materials to enrich play and make learning more meaningful. This is particularly important given the finding that many existing materials lack cultural relevance, often being foreign or generic in nature. Fleer (2010) underscores this point by advocating for play materials that reflect children's social and cultural contexts, as such alignment promotes deeper engagement and supports identity formation during early learning.

The challenge of material maintenance and replacement highlighted by the head teachers also resonates with concerns raised in the literature. Engle et al. (2017) emphasize that sustaining quality learning environments requires not only initial resource provision but ongoing maintenance and replenishment to ensure continuity and effectiveness. Without a reliable system for upkeep, the benefits of play materials are diminished over time, reducing opportunities for creativity and exploration. This echoes the study's finding that maintenance lapses contribute to material scarcity and limit sustained learner engagement.

Moreover, the positive impact of well-resourced play environments on learner creativity and participation corresponds with the assertions of Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2013), who link effective early years leadership and resource provision with enhanced educational outcomes. Their ELEYS study highlights that leadership and management that prioritize resource availability and culturally sensitive materials

directly support rich, play-based learning experiences, fostering children's holistic development.

The study's findings and the literature collectively suggest that while strides have been made toward equipping early grade classrooms with play materials, there is a pressing need to address gaps in variety, cultural appropriateness, and sustainability. Strengthening the provision and maintenance of guided play resources, alongside leveraging local materials, can enhance the quality of early childhood education and better support developmental outcomes in the Ghanaian context.

Research Question 3: How does teacher training impact the use of guided play in early grade classrooms?

Consistent with the literature, the data indicates that targeted professional development workshops significantly enhance teachers' confidence and competence in using guided play. Boakye and Ampadu (2021), in their study of Ghanaian early childhood classrooms, similarly found that teachers who had undergone specific training on guided play were more adept at integrating play-based activities into their lesson plans and employing child-centered teaching strategies. This highlights the importance of practical, hands-on training that moves beyond theoretical knowledge, enabling teachers to understand not just the mechanics but the pedagogical value of guided play.

However, the study also exposes significant gaps in pre-service teacher education concerning guided play, reflecting findings from Ametepee and Cudjoe (2018). Their research in Ghana showed that pre-service teachers often enter the profession with only a superficial understanding of play-based learning, largely due to curricula that emphasize academic content over experiential and play-centered methods. This

disconnect results in teachers who appreciate the importance of play in theory but struggle to design and implement effective guided play activities without further in-service training.

Similar challenges are echoed in broader African contexts. Allee-Herndon and Roberts (2020) report that Kenyan teachers value play-based learning but frequently lack formal training on how to integrate guided play within the constraints of a demanding curriculum. Likewise, Oduolowu and Akintunde (2017) found that Nigerian teachers, especially those trained traditionally, faced difficulties adopting play-based strategies, particularly when confronted with overcrowded classrooms and limited resources. These studies suggest a common continental challenge: teacher education programs do not adequately prepare educators to navigate the complexities of guided play, particularly in resource-constrained and high-pressure teaching environments.

The literature also emphasizes the need for ongoing, context-specific professional development. Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2016) argue that teacher training should focus on helping educators internalize the value of guided play by connecting it to developmental goals such as language acquisition, problem-solving, and social skills. The study's findings that in-service workshops and mentorship programs boost teacher enthusiasm and skill align with this view, underscoring that teacher learning must be continuous and embedded within the realities of classroom practice.

Furthermore, Zosh et al. (2017) highlight the role of supportive systems and resources in sustaining guided play. Their review points to the necessity of not only training but also structural support—such as access to play materials and collaborative planning

time—to enable teachers to maintain guided play as a core pedagogical strategy. The current study's findings about limited resources and inconsistent support resonate with this broader evidence, signaling that training alone is insufficient without complementary systemic backing.

The findings affirm that teacher training is crucial for effective use of guided play in early grades but must be comprehensive and continuous. Pre-service education needs to embed guided play principles deeply, while in-service professional development should be practical, ongoing, and responsive to teachers' challenges. Additionally, systemic support including mentorship, resource provision, and collaborative professional learning communities is vital to translate training into sustained classroom practice. Addressing these interconnected factors will enhance teacher capacity to leverage guided play, ultimately benefiting children's holistic development.

Research Question 4: What role do curriculum guidelines play in shaping the implementation of guided play in early grade education?

Curriculum guidelines play a pivotal role in shaping how guided play is understood and applied by teachers in early grade classrooms. Globally, countries that have explicitly embedded play-based learning within their national curricula offer valuable lessons in how such frameworks can support educators to integrate play as a legitimate and effective pedagogical tool. For example, Finland's National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care provides a comprehensive and balanced approach to guided play. It encourages educators to blend child-initiated play with teacher-directed activities, fostering not only creativity and problem-solving but also foundational academic skills (Pyle, DeLuca, & Danniels, 2017). Similarly,

New Zealand's Te Whāriki curriculum, grounded in sociocultural theory, emphasizes the importance of responsive relationships and play-based learning. It affords teachers flexibility in adapting play experiences to suit children's interests and developmental needs, thereby supporting deeper engagement and learning outcomes (Carr & Lee, 2012; White, Ellis, & O'Malley, 2019).

In contrast, many African countries, including Ghana, face significant challenges in translating curriculum intentions into classroom practice. Despite recognition of play's importance in national policy documents, curriculum guidelines often lack clear, practical strategies and detailed examples that teachers can readily apply. In South Africa, for instance, Ebrahim, Seleti, and Dawes (2016) observed that although the National Curriculum Framework recognizes play as critical for early development, practitioners struggle to implement it effectively due to limited pedagogical knowledge and scarce resources. This leads many educators to revert to traditional didactic methods that prioritize rote learning, thereby sidelining play-based approaches.

A similar situation is evident in Nigeria, where the Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) curriculum stresses play-based learning but offers minimal guidance on how to incorporate guided play into daily classroom activities (Olaleye & Omotayo, 2017). Consequently, teachers' application of guided play is inconsistent and highly dependent on their personal experience and training exposure. These findings mirror those in Ghana, where the 2012 Ghanaian Kindergarten Curriculum by the Ghana Education Service (GES) marked a progressive step toward child-centered, play-based learning. However, studies reveal that many teachers either overlook play components or apply them incorrectly, primarily because the

curriculum lacks clear instructional support and is not backed by sufficient professional development (Ametepee & Cudjoe, 2018).

Boakye and Ampadu's (2021) research further highlights that even where curriculum guidelines promote guided play, practical implementation is hindered by ambiguous curriculum language, large class sizes, inadequate teaching aids, and the pressure to achieve academic benchmarks. Teachers often default to traditional instruction due to these constraints and the absence of explicit, accessible examples of how to merge curriculum objectives with playful learning activities. Moreover, those who have received orientation or targeted workshops on curriculum implementation tend to be more successful in embedding guided play, pointing to the critical role of ongoing teacher training.

Another barrier in the Ghanaian context is a persistent misconception that play is purely recreational and not directly linked to academic achievement. Tandoh and Bediako (2020) argue that unless curriculum documents clearly articulate the educational value of guided play and provide structured frameworks for its application and assessment, teachers are unlikely to prioritize it amid competing academic demands. The lack of assessment tools aligned with play-based learning further diminishes teachers' motivation to adopt such methods, as they find it difficult to measure and report children's progress through play activities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that curriculum reforms in Ghana and similar contexts must go beyond broad policy statements. They should include concrete, practical guidance with examples and resources that enable teachers to confidently integrate guided play into their instruction. Furthermore, teacher education programs must embed play-based pedagogy deeply, accompanied by continuous professional

development opportunities. Addressing systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and material shortages is also essential to create an enabling environment for guided play.

While curriculum guidelines provide a necessary foundation for integrating guided play in early childhood education, their impact depends heavily on clarity, practical support, teacher training, and resource availability. The experiences of countries like Finland and New Zealand offer valuable models, but for Ghana and other African countries to realize the full benefits of guided play, curriculum frameworks must be strengthened and contextualized to meet local realities. Only then can guided play move from policy rhetoric to meaningful classroom practice that nurtures holistic child development.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter of the study, draws conclusions based on these findings, and proposes recommendations aimed at improving the use of guided play in Early Grade centre settings within the Nanumba North Municipality. It also offers suggestions for future research to further investigate the application and impact of guided play in similar contexts.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The study aimed to explore the implementation and effectiveness of guided play in Early Grade centre settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. Four key research objectives guided the study:

1. To explore teachers' views regarding the use of guided play in early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana.
2. To investigate the availability of teaching and learning materials that support guided play in early grade settings.
3. To examine the impact of teacher training on the use of guided play in early grade classrooms.
4. To assess the role of curriculum guidelines in shaping teachers' implementation of guided play in early grade education.

Concurrent Triangulation mixed methods design was utilized, involving census sampling procedure to include 100 kindergarten teachers and purposive sampling to select 9 headteachers. The study employed descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations for quantitative data analysis and thematic analysis for

qualitative data obtained from interviews. The following are the key findings derived from the study.

5.2 Key Findings

Research Question 1: What are the views of early grade teachers regarding the use of guided play in the Nanumba North Municipality of Ghana

Teachers generally held favorable views of guided play, recognizing its role in enhancing children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. They emphasized that guided play promotes curiosity, independent thinking, collaboration, and engagement, allowing learners to explore concepts while benefiting from teacher guidance.

Research Question 2: To what extent are teaching and learning materials that support guided play available in early grade settings?

The study found that while teachers are aware of the importance of materials in facilitating guided play, most early grade classrooms in the Nanumba North Municipality are inadequately resourced. Both teachers and headteachers indicated that there is a shortage of essential play materials such as blocks, puzzles, role-play costumes, and other manipulative tools. Some teachers reported improvising with locally available materials, but these were often not enough to engage all learners meaningfully. The lack of diverse and developmentally appropriate materials hindered the full integration of guided play into daily instruction.

Research Question 3: How does teacher training impact the use of guided play in early grade classrooms?

Findings revealed that teacher training significantly affects the implementation of guided play. Many teachers reported that their pre-service training included limited

content on play-based methodologies. Although some in-service training and workshops had been organized, they were sporadic and not always focused on practical strategies for guided play. Teachers with more targeted training in early childhood play pedagogies showed higher confidence and competence in using guided play in their classrooms. These teachers were also more likely to align play activities with learning outcomes and manage classroom time effectively to accommodate guided play.

Research Question 4: What role do curriculum guidelines play in shaping the implementation of guided play in early grade education?

The study uncovered a gap between the intentions of curriculum policy and its practical application in classrooms. Teachers acknowledged that the early childhood education curriculum advocates for play-based learning, but they found the guidelines on guided play to be vague and lacking in actionable detail. There were few specific examples or structured directions on how to incorporate guided play into daily lesson plans. As a result, teachers often relied on their own interpretations or ignored guided play altogether in favor of more formal teaching methods. This lack of clear guidance from the curriculum has contributed to inconsistencies in the use of guided play across schools in the municipality.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concluded that early grade teachers in the Nanumba North Municipality generally held positive views of guided play, recognizing it as an effective strategy for enhancing children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Teachers reported that guided play fostered curiosity, independent thinking, collaboration, and active engagement, allowing learners to explore concepts while benefiting from teacher

guidance. Despite these positive views, most classrooms were found to be inadequately resourced, with insufficient play materials such as blocks, puzzles, role-play items, and other manipulatives. This shortage limited children's opportunities for meaningful exploration, creativity, and hands-on learning, indicating that the availability of teaching and learning materials remains a critical factor in the successful implementation of guided play.

Teacher training was also identified as a significant determinant of guided play use. Educators who had received targeted pre-service or in-service training in play-based teaching methods were more confident and capable of facilitating guided play, aligning activities with learning outcomes and managing classroom dynamics effectively. Conversely, limited exposure to practical training constrained many teachers' ability to implement guided play consistently.

Furthermore, the study revealed that curriculum guidelines, while advocating for play-based learning, lacked clear, actionable directions for guided play, leading to variations in classroom practices. Teachers often relied on personal judgment or defaulted to formal instruction, which reduced the effectiveness and consistency of play-based activities. While guided play was acknowledged as valuable and engaging, its potential was constrained by inadequate resources, insufficient professional development, and ambiguous curriculum guidance. Addressing these barriers is essential for improving the quality and sustainability of guided play in early grade classrooms.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Educational authorities in the Nanumba North Municipality should prioritize the provision of adequate and diverse teaching and learning materials for guided play. This includes supplying manipulatives, role-play resources, puzzles, blocks, and culturally relevant items that support exploration, creativity, and collaboration among early grade learners.
2. In line with the finding that limited training on guided play hinders its effective implementation, it is recommended that the Educational authorities in the Nanumba North Municipality organize regular and targeted in-service training programs focused specifically on guided play methodologies. Pre-service training curricula for teachers should also be revised to include practical components on the use of guided play in early grade classrooms.
3. To address the shortage of resources that support guided play, Educational authorities in the Nanumba North Municipality should ensure that Early Grade centres are adequately resourced with age-appropriate materials such as building blocks, role-play items, puzzles, and manipulatives. The Directorate should collaborate with local government and NGOs to mobilize resources and provide schools with the tools needed to facilitate meaningful play-based learning.
4. Given the lack of clarity in current curriculum directives regarding guided play, the Educational authorities in the Nanumba North Municipality should advocate for the development and dissemination of clearer curriculum guidelines. These should include specific examples and structured frameworks to help teachers effectively integrate guided play into lesson plans, ensuring alignment with learning outcomes.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research could explore the impact of different types of resources and materials on the effectiveness of guided play. Understanding which resources are most beneficial can help tailor interventions more effectively.

REFERENCES

Abdulai, A. & Batimah, A. (2018). *Challenges facing early childhood education in Northern Ghana*. Tamale: University of Development Studies Press.

Agbenyegah, J. (2008). *Historical development of kindergarten education in Ghana: The role of the Basel Mission*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation.

Agyeman, D., & Agyei, S. (2019). Teaching aids availability and use in early childhood education: A study of rural preschools in Ghana. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 17(1), 25–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X18784366

Akyeampong, K., & Lussier, K. (2019). *Teacher preparation and continuing professional development in Africa: Learning to teach early reading and mathematics*. International Review of Education, 65(1), 45–67.

Akyeampong, K., Pryor, J., & Ampiah, J. G. (2013). Access to basic education in Ghana: The evidence and the issues. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(2), 196–208. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.09.003

Alex, L., & Nancy, A. (2021). *Foundations of Research in Early Childhood Education*. Routledge.

Allee-Herndon, K. A., & Roberts, S. K. (2020). Teachers' views of play-based learning: Insights from early childhood classrooms in Kenya. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *48*(5), 511–520. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-01008-w

Ametepee, L. K., & Cudjoe, B. (2018). Examining play-based learning and the role of Ghanaian early childhood teachers. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, *7*(2), 12–24.

Asare, K., & Mensah, R. (2021). Local materials and play in early childhood classrooms in Ghana: Teacher perspectives and practices. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(7), 1071–1082. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1677441

Aura, L., Kimathi, E., & Mugo, J. (2021). *Play-based learning in Africa: Policy and practice gaps in early childhood education*. African Education Review, 18(3), 1–20.Badu, A. (2015). *Play and storytelling in Ghanaian kindergartens: A case study of Accra Metropolis*. Journal of Early Childhood Education, 23(2), 41–55.

Baldwin, J. M. (2012). *Development and evolution: The dynamics of growth and form*. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1902)

Bates, J. (2005). *Curriculum frameworks and play: Constructing curriculum to support children's play*. Early Child Development and Care, 175(6), 597–610.

Biesta, G. (2010). *Pragmatism and the philosophical foundations of mixed methods research*. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (2nd ed., pp. 95–118). SAGE Publications.

Boakye, C., & Ampadu, E. (2021). Teachers' perspectives on guided play and its implementation in Ghanaian early childhood classrooms. *Ghana Journal of Education and Teaching*, *2*(1), 45–60.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2015). *Vygotskian perspectives on play and early literacy development*. In D. Singer, R. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play = Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children's Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth* (pp. 139–154). Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Carr, M., & Lee, W. (2012). *Learning stories: Constructing learner identities in early education*. Sage Publications.

Chiatovich, E., & Stipek, D. (2016). Early childhood education and the impact of pedagogy on low-income children's development. *Early Education and Development*, 27(6), 883–896. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1156984

Cook, K., Thomas, A., & Mensah, S. (2023). *Learning through play in sub-Saharan Africa: Teacher perspectives and material support*. Journal of African Educational Research, 8(2), 25–39.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crosnoe, R. (2010). The child-centered approach in early childhood education. *Child Development Perspectives*, 4(2), 132–138. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2010.00122.x

Daniels, H. (2005). *An introduction to Vygotsky*. Routledge.

De Vaus, D. A. (2014). *Surveys in Social Research* (6th ed.). Routledge.

DeVellis, R. F. (2017). *Scale Development: Theory and Applications* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Doku, V., & Asare, K. (2022). *Teacher views and practices of play-based learning in Ghanaian basic schools*. Ghana Journal of Education and Teaching, 11(1), 78–94.

Ebrahim, H. B., Seleti, Y. N., & Dawes, A. (2016). Learning begins at birth: Improving access to early learning. In *South African Child Gauge 2016* (pp. 47–54). Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

Engle, P. L., Fernald, L. C., Alderman, H., Behrman, J., O'Gara, C., Yousafzai, A., & Global Child Development Steering Group. (2017). Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet*, 378(9799), 1339–1353. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60555-2

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.

Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs: Principles and practices. *Health Services Research, 48*(6pt2), 2134–2156. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12117

Field, A. (2013). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (4th ed.). Sage.

Fink, A. (2017). *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fisher, K. R. (2016). Learning through guided play: A strategy for scaffolding early childhood development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 36(2), 365–376. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.10.007

Fisher, K. R., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Newcombe, N. S., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2011). *Taking shape: Supporting preschoolers' acquisition of geometric knowledge through guided play*. Child Development, 82(1), 187–197.

Fleer, M. (2010). *Early learning and development: Cultural-historical concepts in play*. Cambridge University Press.

George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference* (11.0 update). Allyn & Bacon.

GES (Ghana Education Service). (2024). *Early Childhood Education curriculum framework*. Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Education.

Ghana Statistical Service. (2021). *2021 Population and Housing Census: Summary report of final results*. Accra: GSS.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Sage.

Guion, L. A., Diehl, D. C., & McDonald, D. (2011). *Triangulation: Establishing the validity of qualitative studies*. University of Florida IFAS Extension. https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/fy394

Gujarati, D. N. (2013). *Basic Econometrics* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Gupta, M., & Gupta, R. (2018). *Active learning strategies in modern classrooms: Theoretical foundations and evidence from research*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 17(4), 201–219.

Gutek, G. L. (2011). *Philosophical and ideological voices in education* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Hedegaard, M. (2005). *Learning and child development in cultural-historical activity theory*. Aarhus University Press.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Berk, L. E., & Singer, D. (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Presenting the evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014

Kapur, D. (2018). Physical health and school readiness: A review of research evidence. *Journal of Child Development*, 89(2), 350–364.

Kekesi, D. K., Donkor, S. K., & Torkonyo, M. (2019). Early Childhood Education Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Play as a Teaching Technique in Afadjato South District of the Volta Region, Ghana. Education Quarterly Reviews, 2(3), 504-516.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Leech, N. L., Barrett, K. C., & Morgan, G. A. (2015). *IBM SPSS for Intermediate Statistics* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Leroy, A. (2019). *Principles of Educational Research*. Pearson Education.

Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archives of Psychology*, 22(140), 1–55.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Maxwell, K., Aggrey, N., & Boateng, E. (2021). Literacy and problem-solving in Ghanaian Kindergarten learners: Outcomes and challenges. *Journal of Early Childhood Studies*, 39(1), 45–60.

Moll, L. C. (2014). *L. S. Vygotsky and education*. Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 48–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292462

Morrissey, A., Winter, L., & Rouse, E. (2007). *Early childhood education in Africa: Insights into curriculum reform and implementation*. Childhood Education International, 83(5), 275–281.

NaCCA/MOE. (2019). *Kindergarten curriculum framework for Ghana (KG1 and KG2)*. Accra: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment & Ministry of Education.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). *Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1–13.

Nsowah-Nuamah, N., Osei-Poku, P., & Ankomah, E. (2017). *Educational reforms in Ghana and the role of early childhood education*. Ghana Education Review, 9(2), 33–47.

Oduolowu, E. A., & Akintunde, O. E. (2017). Implementation of play-based curriculum in Nigerian early childhood education settings. *Early Child Development and Care*, *187*(7), 1162–1173. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1152965

Olaleye, Y. L., & Omotayo, K. A. (2017). Early childhood education in Nigeria: Curriculum implementation and challenges. *African Educational Research Journal*, *5*(2), 109–115. https://doi.org/10.30918/AERJ.52.17.022

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544.

Parker, M., Ssempebwa, J., & Otieno, C. (2022). *Guided play and cognitive development: Insights from East African preschool classrooms*. African Journal of Childhood Studies, 6(1), 15–28.

Parker, R., Collins, L., & Bell, J. (2022). Enablers and barriers to guided play in early childhood settings: A systematic review. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 58, 145–160. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.07.002

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Plano Clark, V. L., & Ivankova, N. V. (2016). *Mixed methods research: A guide to the field*. SAGE Publications.

Pyle, A., DeLuca, C., & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education. *Review of Education*, *5*(3), 311–351. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3097

Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings* (3rd ed.). Wiley.

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.

Seefeldt, C. (2014). *Social studies for the preschool/primary child* (10th ed.). Pearson.

Seidman, I. (2016). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.

SIEF Report. (2018). *Expansion of Free Compulsory Basic Education in Ghana: Early Childhood Education phase*. Accra: Ghana Ministry of Education.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Sage.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Manni, L. (2013). *Effective leadership in the early years sector: The ELEYS study*. Institute of Education Press.

Tandoh, R. A., & Bediako, J. K. (2020). Challenges of implementing play-based learning in public kindergarten schools in Ghana. *African Journal of Educational Studies in Mathematics and Sciences*, *16*(2), 67–80.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2010). *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). *Making Sense of Cronbach's Alpha*. *International Journal of Medical Education*, 2, 53–55.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Weikart, D. P. (2013). *How HighScope grew: A remembrance*. HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2016). Guided play: Where curricular goals meet a playful pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, *10*(3), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12150

White, E. J., Ellis, F., & O'Malley, A. (2019). *Play and learning in the early years: An inclusive approach*. Routledge.

Whitebread, D. (2012). *The importance of play: A report on the value of children's play with a series of policy recommendations*. Toy Industries of Europe.

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x

Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., ... & Whitebread, D. (2017). Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00494

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

FACULTY OF BEHAVIOURAL AND APPLIED SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

QUESTIONAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Respondents,

I am Abdul Rahman, a Master of Philosophy candidate of the University of Education, Winneba researching on the topic "Teacher's Use of Guided Play in Early Grade Settings in the Nanumba North Municipality". I wish to request you to fill this questionnaire with frankness and objectivity to obtain important information for the research. Your contribution towards the completion of this questionnaire will be highly appreciated and the information provided will be used for academic purposes only and shall be treated with the outmost confidentiality it deserves.

Thank you.

Instruction: Please indicate your answer by ticking (√) and writing where applicable.

PART 1

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF RESPONDENTS

1. Sex

a. Male [ ]

b. Female [ ]

2. Age Range

a. 20 and below [ ]

b. 21 – 30 [ ]

c. 31- 40 [ ]

d. 41-50 [ ]

e. 51-60 [ ]

3. Area of Specialization

a. Early Childhood Education [ ]

b. Basic Education [ ]

c. Other(Specify)……

4. Highest Professional Qualification

a. Certificate in ECE [ ]

b. Diploma in ECE [ ]

c. Degree in ECE [ ]

d. Masters in ECE [ ]

e. Other

(Specify)…….

5. Rank in the Ghana Education Service

a. Superintendent I [ ]

b. Superintendent II [ ]

c. Senior Superintendent II [ ]

d. Senior Superintendent II [ ]

e. Principal Superintendent [ ]

f. Assistant Director II [ ]

g. Assistant Director I [ ]

h. Other

(Specify)……..

6. Number of Years in Service as Kindergarten Teachers

a. 0-5 years [ ]

b. 6-10 years [ ]

c. 11-15 years [ ]

d. 16-20 years [ ]

e. 21 years and above [ ]

PART II

DATA ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

SECTION A: The factors that influence early grade teachers' use of guided play at early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality

The table below presents data on factors that influence early grade teachers' use of guided play at early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. Read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (√) 1= Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree(D),3=Agree(A) and 4=Strongly Agree (SA)

SECTION B: Teachers deploy guided play in the teaching process in early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality

The table below presents data on Teachers deploy guided play in the teaching process in early grade settings in the Nanumba North Municipality. Read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (√) 1= Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree(D),3=Agree(A) and 4=Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	***Statement***	***SD 1***	***D 2***	***A 3***	***SA 4***
17	I frequently incorporate guided play into my daily lesson plans.				
18	Guided play activities are adapted to meet the developmental needs of my children.				
19	I use a variety of materials and resources to support guided play in my classroom.				
20	I regularly observe that guided play enhances children social and emotional development.				
21	I provide clear instructions and guidance during guided play activities.				
22	Guided play sessions are effectively integrated with other teaching activities.				
23	I receive feedback from my peers or supervisors on my use of guided play.				
24	I feel that guided play is an effective strategy for achieving curriculum goals.				
25	I adjust guided play activities based on ongoing assessment of children progress.				
26	I find that guided play encourages children participation and engagement in the learning process.				

SECTION C: Teaching and Learning Materials That Support Guided Play

The table below presents data on the availability and use of teaching and learning materials for guided play in early grade centres in the Nanumba North Municipal. Read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (√): 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	***Statement***	***SD 1***	***D 2***	***A 3***	***SA 4***
27	There are sufficient play materials available to support guided play activities.				
28	The available materials are age-appropriate for the learners.				
29	The classroom space is adequate for implementing guided play.				
30	Materials for guided play are regularly maintained and replaced.				
31	The school provides a variety of materials to facilitate different types of guided play.				
32	Teachers have access to local resources to create improvised play materials.				
33	Learners actively engage with the materials provided for guided play.				
34	Materials used during guided play reflect learners' cultural and social backgrounds.				
35	Visual, auditory, and tactile learning materials are used during guided play sessions.				
36	Materials used during guided play promote creativity and exploration.				

SECTION D: Teacher Training Impact on the Use of Guided Play

The table below presents responses on how teacher training influences the use of guided play in early grade classrooms. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement by ticking (√): 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 4.5: Teacher Training Impact on the Use of Guided Play

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have received adequate training on implementing guided play.						
Workshops on guided play have improved my teaching strategies.						
Pre-service training included strategies for guided play.						
I feel confident using guided play due to my professional development.						
In-service training sessions often address guided play methods.						
I have opportunities to observe model lessons using guided play.						
Ongoing coaching and mentoring help me refine guided play techniques.						
Training sessions provide practical examples for guided play implementation.						
I receive support from teacher resource centres on guided play practices.						
Training has enhanced my ability to assess learning outcomes from guided play activities.						

E: Curriculum Guidelines and Their Role in Shaping Guided Play

This section gathers views on how the curriculum supports or limits the implementation of guided play in early grade settings. 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Agree (A), 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 4.5: Curriculum Guidelines and Their Role in Shaping Guided Play

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The curriculum clearly includes guided play as a teaching strategy.						
Learning objectives are aligned with guided play activities.						
Curriculum documents provide examples of guided play activities.						
The curriculum encourages learner-centred approaches like guided play.						
Teachers are given flexibility within the curriculum to implement guided play.						
Curriculum guidelines are supported by appropriate assessment tools for guided play.						
Curriculum requirements allow sufficient time for guided play activities.						
The curriculum promotes integration of guided play with core subjects.						
Teachers are oriented on how to interpret the curriculum in favour of guided play.						
The curriculum recognizes the developmental benefits of guided play in early childhood.						

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

FACULTY OF BEHAVIOURAL AND APPLIED SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

TEACHER'S USE OF GUIDED PLAY IN EARLY GRADE SETTINGS IN THE NANUMBA NORTH MUNICIPALITY

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HEAD TEACHERS

Name of Interviewee (Pseudonym):…….

Interview Date:……./……./……

Duration:……

Time:…….

SECTION A: The Factors That Influence Early Grade Teachers' Use of Guided Play

1. How do you perceive the impact of available resources (e.g., play materials, classroom space) on the implementation of guided play by teachers?
2. In what ways does the level of professional training and development affect teachers' ability to effectively use guided play?
3. How does the support from school leadership influence teachers' use of guided play in their classrooms?
4. How do teachers' views of the benefits of guided play influence their decision to use it in their teaching practices?

SECTION B: Teaching and Learning Materials That Support Guided Play Available in Early Grade Settings

1. What types of teaching and learning materials are available in your school to support guided play in early grade classrooms?

2. How do the available materials influence the implementation of guided play activities?
3. Are there challenges in acquiring or using these materials for guided play? Please explain.
4. How often are these materials updated or supplemented to ensure effective guided play experiences?

SECTION C: Teacher Training Impact on the Use of Guided Play in Early Grade Classrooms

1. What kind of training have teachers in your school received specifically on guided play approaches?
2. In what ways does teacher training affect the frequency and quality of guided play implementation?
3. Are there professional development opportunities available to support teachers' use of guided play?
4. What improvements would you suggest to enhance teacher training on guided play pedagogy?

SECTION D: Curriculum Guidelines in Shaping the Implementation of Guided Play in Early Grade Education

1. How clear and supportive are the current curriculum guidelines in promoting guided play at the early grade level?
2. In what ways do these guidelines influence teachers' lesson planning and instructional strategies?
3. Are there gaps between the curriculum expectations and classroom realities in terms of guided play?

4. What recommendations would you make to improve curriculum policies to better support guided play?

Thank You for Your Participation. I'm Very Grateful for Your Time