

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**THE ROLE OF THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHER IN ENHANCING KG
LEARNERS' PROFICIENCY IN READING IN AKUAPEM SOUTH
MUNICIPALITY**

FREDLINA MENSAH-SARBAH

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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**A Thesis in The Department of Early Childhood Education,
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Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment
of the requirement for the award of the degree of**

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(Early Childhood Education)

In the University of Education, Winneba

NOVEMBER, 2024

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, **Fredlina Mensah-Sarbah** do undertake that this dissertation was research into the topic stated and that all references have been duly acknowledged. The area of study and final topic has been dully approved.

Date:

Signature:

Supervisor's Declaration

I, Justina Adu do hereby declare that this thesis was dully supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis/ dissertation and that the topic was approved by the University of Education, Winneba.

Date:.....

Signature:

MRS. JUSTINA ADU

(SUPERVISOR)

DEDICATION

This publication is dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing body of research about the role that teachers play in early grade literacy however localizing such studies in metropolitan, municipal, district and agencies (MMDAs) within the state of Ghana is a new phenomenon emerging. Further, studies focusing on how jurisdiction-specific-factors influence and shape how these teacher roles are carried out have not received much attention. As a result, the current study explored the factors that influence teachers in their role to enhance reading proficiency among early graders within the Akuapem South municipality. The study which employed qualitative phenomenological design allowed researcher to probe into the lived experiences of how KG teachers discharge their duties in the classroom in the municipality. Twelve participants recruited by purposive and convenient sampling techniques from 105 kindergarten teachers within the ASM education directorate participated in the study. Using, thematic analysis to analyse the interview transcripts, five-fold themes were developed from the dataset. The themes included the use of Jolly Phonics centred teaching approaches, teacher agency (knowledge and skill-set of teachers), improvised teaching, learning resources, general challenges and the impact of teachers; role on reading performance. A checklist to ascertain the instructional skills of KG teachers was also designed to observe participants' reports. It was found that the parental negligence, community difficulties and inadequate provision of TLRs and other educational materials contributed to the challenges. Also, teaching approaches and the teacher agency of educators are foxed with lots of constraints and challenges that impede the teaching of KG learners in the municipality. However, teachers reported relying on their agency of qualification, experience and teaching philosophy to achieve their goal of enhancing the reading proficiency among KG learners. These results are discussed in the context of provision of teaching and learning resources as well as other stake-holder involvement are recommended in order to develop early-grade education in the municipality.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Globally, new pedagogical approaches and methods are being devised so as to enhance education as a whole and more particularly early childhood education at the kindergarten level. Education at the kindergarten level is delicate and requires the special role of teachers and the approaches they adopt to lay firm foundation for early and future learning so as to augment career success (Badu, et al., 2022). In Ghana, Africa and the world over, a teacher's role involves the use of efficient approaches and methods to assist learners to acquire knowledge and skill through instruction and assessment. This role of a teacher is even more critical at the kindergarten level since it is what lays the foundation for future learning, productivity and general life success (Badu et al., 2022).

At the kindergarten level, reading is particularly important because it forms the language for the instruction for all the other subjects to be learnt. The ability to understand any subject is based on the foundation of being able to read and understand the language of instruction. As a result, inability to read and understand becomes a major impediment in a learner's quest to progress well in education. In order to overcome this impediment and achieve progressive education, a paramount role of the teacher at the kindergarten level is to use effective approaches that enhances the reading proficiency of the KG learner. The United States National Association of Young Children (NAEYC) describes enhancement in learning as the use of numerous teaching styles to ensure that all children are able to learn and succeed. This description is not different from the goal of early childhood education in Ghana under the Ghana Education Service (GES). The GES especially under the current Standard Based curriculum (SBC) defines the teacher as a facilitator to help kindergarten learners to progress in reading and all other learning (GES, 2019). This aspiration and goal of the education service

in Ghana is of critical importance to the Akuapem South Municipality (ASM), where basic education is a major challenge.

In spite of the prestige and fame of this municipality it is a place where basic education has suffered perennial underachievement for a long time. From the year 2017 to 2023, BECE pass rates ranged from average of 54.20% pass to 55.30% rates and in the year 2023 there was merely an increase of 1.30% in the pass rates (*Source: Field research from Akuapem South Municipality Educational Directorate, 2023*). These below standard results have been blamed on poor teaching and learning at the early grade level. The lack of proficiency in reading among KG learners is considered the fundamental reason which affects the overall foundation of basic education from primary to the Junior High School level. Paramount to this problem is the role of teachers in education at the basic level. At the basic level the ASM has 35 early childhood education centres (ECEs) with KG learning classes out of which only 16 are adequately endowed and 24 less endowed as at 2024. As indicated the majority of the KG learning centres of 24 out of 35 are less endowed implying that they lack TLRs such as well-equipped school building infrastructure, commodious compounds for learning, social amenities like water and healthy public places of convenience, classroom resources such as letter cards, alphabet freeze, sentence cards, picture books, ICT tools such as computers and bluetooth to mention but some. Even some of the so-called endowed KG centres lack the adequate prints on the walls, while others have poor lighting and ventilation in the classrooms.

Apart from the challenges that has to do with TLRs, the level of training of the teachers, their personal knowledge, philosophy of KG instruction and motivation to facilitate learning among kindergarteners can also play a role in enhancing reading proficiency outcomes. In a training workshop for stakeholders, the examination officer of ASMED indicated that there were several challenges in the competence and skill levels of KG teachers handling the learners at the various ECEs within the municipality (Field report). This situation brings into question

the role of teachers in their full agency to discharge their duties if reading proficiency would be attained at the kindergarten level. These competent teachers must not be concentrated at the so-called well-endowed schools but all the five main circuits of the education directorate including KT, AB circuit, NB, OB and PK circuits.

Continuous studies into early childhood education reveals that early learning experiences related to reading and writing forms a firm foundation not only for later academic success but overall psychological, emotional and social wellbeing of the individual as well as adult productivity (Badu, et al., 2022; Opong Frimpong & Woode-Eshun, 2023).

Studies have highlighted the varying but important roles of all the stakeholders in enhancing education. Among these stakeholders are teachers whose organizational skills, cultural adaptiveness and the specific activities deployed in the school setting can influence KG learners in the quest of achieving proficiency in reading and writing (Biesta et al., 2015; Calvert, 2016 and Molla & Nolan, 2020).

Secondly, it has been found that the readiness of the learners is equally of critical importance to the achievement of reading and writing proficiency among KG learners in ECEs (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012 and Majzub & Rashid 2012). However, child readiness cannot be achieved without the critical involvement of parents who are the foundation upon whom KG learners are first raised in terms of their development psychosocially and educationally. As found by other studies, child readiness can only be guaranteed when parental readiness in terms of their knowledge of KG learners' educational needs and their total support to help achieve it is in place (Fedina et al., 2017). Here again, parents' readiness to fully avail their toddlers to the early childhood education system and totally support them in terms of financial and moral backing can be enhanced if the community within which both parents and children live have goodwill for kindergarten education and social support systems that can assist the KG learners, their parents and even the teachers who facilitate learning. Such was the trend that studies

conducted within recent times seem to be pointing (Megersa et al., 2019; Owen & Anderson 2017).

Additionally, the political will of the state and government policy is also important in the realization of the goal of enhanced and efficient early childhood educational systems within any jurisdiction. The development of the right educational systems and periodic reforms to fine-tune it for efficient and better ECE outcomes also depends on the provision of the necessary infrastructure and the day-to-day teaching and learning resources to make the enhancement of ECE a reality. Sometimes, the political will has multiple effects on both the community, parents, teachers and the kindergarteners to work together as stakeholders in a harmonious and resourceful fashion. This multiple ripple effect was also alluded to in the studies implicated above (Megersa et al., 2019; Owen & Anderson, 2017).

Having identified the critical stakeholders and the various roles they can play to achieve enhanced reading and writing at the KG level, it must be emphasized that, there is a coordinating handle that can serve as the practical leadership in the classroom of ECEs in the form of teacher facilitation which is drawn from a teacher's agency to harness the strengths and contributions of all the various stakeholders in achieving proficiency in learning among kindergarteners. In Ghana, the education ministry has implemented a new curriculum reform known as the standard based curriculum (SBC) with the quest of improving on teaching and learning in the school particularly at the ECE level (GES, 2019).

Although it is laudable and calls on all the key stakeholders to participate in its implementation, it still hinges on the invaluable coordinating role of teacher's agency to facilitate all the strength to achieve the outcomes of enhanced teaching and learning. This is because there are schools that were successful in achieving improved outcomes of teaching and learning under the old curriculum due to competent teacher agency while there is the likelihood to fail in enhancing teaching and learning even in the so-called new SBC if the facilitation

through the teacher agency is not in active function. Teacher agency here refers to all the qualifications, competencies in managing the class sizes and classroom dynamics, adoption of relevant teaching approaches, experience on the job and practical experience that makes a teacher to be efficient and effective in achieving success outcomes with their learners (Badu et al., 2022; Biesta et al, 2015; Calvert, 2016; Molla & Nohan 2020; Opong Frimpong & Eshun-Woode, 2023).

As a result, the current research has devised the following as the conceptual framework to outline the various factors and conditions that need to be engaged and properly steered to understand why better outcomes or low standards result from ECE in the country and more particularly Akuapem South Municipality.

It is the quest of this current study to investigate the critical role of the teacher in boosting the learning protocols of kindergarteners in ECEs and how that boost proficiency in their reading skills. Teachers' agency here implies all the organizational skills, cultural adaptiveness and the specific activities deployed by a teacher to influence KG learners in the quest of achieving proficiency in reading (Biesta et. al., 2015; Calvert, 2016; Molla & Nolan, 2020).

The requisite duty and role of the teacher apart from other stakeholders that are used to create a vibrant teaching and learning environment allowing for KG learners to be proficient in reading, is being explored within the Akuapem South municipality, a setting where most of the stakeholders in the public basic school system seems to concede that the municipality has been foxed with perennial academic underachievement.

Studies in Neuroscience and Developmental Child Psychology have revealed that there is a spurt growth of the human brain from age (0-10 years) that predisposes the KG learner with the aptitudes for cognitive, emotional, behavioural, lingual as well as physical development (Badu et. al., 2022; Tierney & Nelson, 2009). The first part of this decade (0-

5years) is a critical stage since children are prepared for Basic 1 when they enter the primary school and therefore are found in the KG stage of the ECE. This is a crucial stage for the KG educator to deploy all their training competencies, expertise and agency to assist the children in learning to read and write since they spend a considerable part of their time within the setting of an early childhood centre of learning.

Apart from writing, the development of the proficiency in reading is the single most fundamental and essential achievement for KG learners (Badu et.al., 2022; Fellowes & Oakley, 2019). The development of proficiency in reading and becoming a skilful reader is based on the foundation of oral language, phonological awareness and print knowledge on the part of the kindergarten learner (Badu et al.) This foundation is also related to how well kindergarten learners will learn to read upon their commencement of formal reading instruction at the early stage of their life (Lonigan, et al., 2011).

According to Oster-Granite et al., (2001) the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], an effective reading instruction must address five important areas namely phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension of the KG Learner. These five components of reading proficiency were incorporated into the “*No Child left behind*” Act of 2001 as well as the initiative dubbed *Reading First* initiative which was subsequently integrated into all reading instruction. Ghana’s new curriculum for primary schools which was christened *Curriculum for Change and Sustainable Development* required teachers to target and develop these skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension among their KG learners (GES, 2019). These points to the all-important role of these essential components of reading proficiency among KG learners.

One important role of the teacher is instruction. The second associated role in the appropriate assessment based on KG learner’s needs and skills obtained through the adopted instruction. The instructional function can be better discharged if a teacher can instinctively

identify the learning needs of individual KG learners in their appreciation for orthographic scribbles, comprehension, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, letter identification among others to guide the pattern and intensity of instruction. When the KG learners' needs are well appreciated, then appropriate instructions can be adopted leading to effective teaching and learning.

Eventually, appropriate assessments can follow the pattern of instruction to ascertain whether the KG learner has achieved learning in reading proficiency. For instance, due to their ability to identify the peculiar needs of their KG Learners, teachers can use their instructional expertise to choose the scope and pattern of learning based on the abilities of the child and the corresponding assessments to ascertain when learning is achieved. As Badu et. al, (2022) observed teachers are better able to match instruction with assessment and track how well children learning and developing reading skills are faring. At this stage, assessment cannot be done with standardized tests since such tests have validity and reliability problems due to the fact that they were not developed with the unique pattern of learning in the particular contexts of our KG Learners in question. This is why the invaluable role of teachers with their agency is required to better instruct the KG Learners, assess their reading improvement and adopt the appropriate assessment items for overall assessment and promotion to the next level of academic development.

The Akuapem South Municipality appears to be a virgin research area with regards to early childhood education centres and even basic education. An extensive search for published studies in the municipality from all relevant publishing sites resulted in no work sighted except for publications on conflict management practices in senior high schools in the Akuapem south municipality. School feeding has led to an increase in enrollment, retention and attendance of pupils, however, the academic performance of pupils in basic schools within the municipality has not been improved.

1.2 Problem Statement

Recent studies in early childhood education tends to point to lowering standards of education across board (Jacobs et al., 2021). The factors that may have given rise to account for this phenomenon seems diverse beginning with instructional methods all through to the modern globalization and its implications on early grade education. This poor standards in education may even be dire for kindergarteners who are not instructed by qualified and well-trained teachers with competencies in the current trend of instructional approaches and assessments. In deprived public schools the availability of teaching and learning materials (TLRs) as well as the unavailability of adequate number of teachers for the ECEs as noted by Oppong Frimpong & Woode-Eshun, (2023), may pose threat for education at the kindergarten level.

Although teaching and learning resources (TLRs) may be less available in some schools compared to others, the ingenuity, versatility and creativity of a teacher in either case can make the difference. For instance, recent studies about literary skills among Kindergarteners in Shama district revealed that instructional skills as well as class management abilities of teachers plays a critical role in attaining literacy in the district (Oppong Frimpong & Eshun-Woode, 2023). A similar study at Atwima Kwanwoma district by Badu et al., (2022), recommended the need to assess the skills appropriate competencies of KG learners in reading and writing and to motivate the teachers in that regard so as to boost morale of both teachers and KG learners alike in proficiency. This recommendation buttresses the important role of the KG teacher in improving the KG Learners' proficiency at the Early Grade. However, a search in the literature about the specific role of the KG teacher in these modern times in improving KG learners' proficiency is unfortunately nonavoidable. As a result of the lack of study into the kind of current approaches being adopted by KG Teachers, the level of instructional skills

of the KG Teachers, the teaching and learning resources available to the KG Teacher and the identifiable challenges the teachers themselves report of, the current study became momentous.

Due to the inadequate research about the above-mentioned factors in the teacher's role in the current globalized world and more particularly no existing study like that ever done within the Akuapem South municipality (ASM), as well as how these factors may impact on their role in achieving learners' proficiency, the current study was designed. This study has prospects to fill the grave knowledge gap in recent research in general and the lack of data within the ASM education as well as reveal the state of affairs to intervene to remedy the problem of poor educational factors associated with the teacher's role and function to engender better KG educational outcomes.

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the ingenious role of the KG teacher who serves as the facilitator in teaching and learning among KG learners to achieve proficiency in reading within the context of the complex environmental circumstances in the Akuapem South Municipality.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific study objectives are as follows:

- To investigate the specific approaches teachers, use in and outside the classroom to enhance proficiency in reading
- To investigate the instructional skills used by KG Teachers to promote proficiency in reading
- To investigate the resources available to the teacher to help achieve proficiency in reading
- To study the challenges teachers, encounter in their teaching responsibility among KG learners.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the approaches in teaching that helps enhance proficiency in reading among KG learners in Akuapem South Municipality?
2. What instructional skills or knowledge do KG teachers use in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners in ECEs in Akuapem South Municipality?
3. What are the resources available for use by KG teachers to enhance reading proficiency among kindergarteners.
4. What are the challenges faced by teachers in their quest to enhance teaching proficiency among KG learners.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In the current context of increasing educational reforms and introduction of new curriculum strategy (i.e., the standard based curriculum), studies that affords the insight into the unique roles of teachers in kindergarten education cannot be overemphasized. The current study is fundamental and significant to help unravel the distinct role of the teacher within this continually unfolding reforms in education. This study has the potential to help understand emerging teaching approaches best suited in a constant changing educational environment. Since the study deals with the main stakeholders for enhancing KG education, the actual teaching and learning materials on the ground can be found from the those on the ground which can help determine what is left to be added to bring the standards to the level being envisaged by educational experts and educational policy reformers like government.

Consequently, findings from the study may help to focus attention on improving teacher capacity building and training to facilitate learning at the delicate kindergarten stage. Indeed, this study can help explain and institute the relevant controls in ensuring that the teachers who

facilitate KG education are given extra training since their success is what forms the foundation for all the subsequent learning of the learners.

Additionally, findings from this study should increase understanding on the role of the teacher in the current educational curriculum, the needs of teachers in general and rural KG teachers in particular and the appropriate interventions needed by Ghana Education Service (GES) as well as other stake holders in helping to achieve set goals as well as the UN Sustainable development goals (SDGs) on education. This important study could become a guide to policy makers on education in revising policy, reviewing curriculum and drafting a plan for teacher development and improvement.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The current study could have been quite broad due to the number of KG teachers within the Akuapem South municipality. For qualitative purposes it would not have been feasible to take the over 105 KG teachers within the sample area and interview all of them. Some of the respondents though they are considered as KG teacher may not be adequately trained and others are not articulate to help obtain data for research that requires articulate expression of views and experiences. Due to these concerns the use of researcher discretion was adopted to ensure that only suitable KG teachers who were readily available are purposively recruited and those who expressed their views and experiences were conveniently interviewed.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The current study had a limited scope to the Akuapem South Municipal Directorate of Education. Also, during the investigations, the views of important stakeholders was found to be very pertinent to the study since KG learners do not live and learn in isolation but are shaped with the complex environment of the family at home, the communities within which their schools are found and the culture in their traditional area. However, in order to explore

the unique role of the teacher, efforts were made to tone down the involvement of the other stakeholders so that the unique role of the teacher would be the dominant feature in the current study. As a result, findings from this study can be transferred only to teachers in similar context and more particularly, the ASM KG teacher.

1.9 Definition of Terms

The dominant subject of this study is the Kindergartener and the KG teacher. In the West the Kindergartener is one who as a preschooler is considered eligible for early grade education through the performance of basic functions that require a range of dimensions, such as a child's health and physical development. Other eligibility factors for KG learners in west include social and emotional development, the child's ability to learn, language and communicate through the use of cognitive and their general knowledge (Rae, 2011). In Ghana, preschoolers are considered eligible for KG education at age 4 to 6, a period believed to be the stage where all the skills identified by Rae is achieved (GES, 2019). A KG teacher is therefore a qualified teacher who has been trained in a teacher training college and have qualified in Early Grade Education with the appropriate skills set for KG instruction as well as the classroom experience and carrying out her role with an effective teaching philosophy (GES, 2019). The proficiency of learning is the situation where the KG learner acquires the ability to combine letters, sounds to pronounce words appropriately through the teacher's facilitation.

1.10 Organization of the Study

The current study is organized as follows:

Chapter 1 deals with the introduction and background to the study, Problem Statement, Objectives and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 involves introduction to the literature review, defining key terminologies and constructs pertaining to the study.

Chapter 3 presents the rationale for the methodology and details pertinent to the procedures.

Chapter 4 covers a comprehensive presentation of the research findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings with regard to key literature and psychological and educational theory as well as conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section aimed to review relevant theories and empirical literature surrounding the critical role of the teacher in kindergarten learner's proficiency in reading. The topics reviewed include the setting of the classroom scene for learning, teaching from mother tongue and the adoption of arts such as jolly phonics and singing and dancing in teaching. At the outset, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are discussed and the emergent concepts and terminologies identified. Then, the discussion of the empirical studies in the area were presented. This was followed with the review of any additional studies related to the concepts found. Finally, the synthesis of the literature review was also presented.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted two theories to serve as the overarching theoretical framework. The first is the **ecological systems' theory** (also, bioecological theory) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The second is the **language acquisition theory** (Chomsky, 1957).

Language development theory: Chomsky contends that language development is biologically based and that once children acquire sufficient vocabulary, they can combine words into sound grammatical sentences in their speech as well as understand the meaning of sentences they hear (Chomsky, 1957; Sobecks, 2020). Chomsky's theory is essentially language development focussed (**language acquisition device**). However, the theory seems to lay more emphasis on the biological factors as the main blue print to determine the language and reading proficiency of the early child and for that matter KG learners.

Language Acquisition Device (LAD) – This is the terminology Chomsky, cited in Sobecks, (2020) used to argue that there are internal mental structures that are in-born or biological and forms the basis to interpret language as well as to generate and read one. By implication

Chomsky is suggesting that the capacity for kindergarten learners to read proficiently is significantly hereditary and genetic. This position will further imply that to achieve reading proficiency as a learner, parents may have to pay attention to their genetics, diet and biological health to form the basis of the genetic engineering that makes for ease in reading for KG learners. The implication of Chomsky's theory of language acquisition device must be considered in determining the readiness of children for kindergarten learning to read experience. In effect, beyond the traditional chronological age of 4years when a child is considered ready for KG learning experience (GES, 2019), the accompanying biological age of sound health reflected in the child's ability to listen to instructions without interruptions, hear words that rhyme, see likeness and differences in pictures, designs and words that match among others (Pesando, et al., 2020) should be a critical factor in screening KG learners for the KG experience.

However, Behaviourists and the other Social learning theorists such as Skinner, Watson and Albert Bandura to mention a few considers Chomsky's position as either a reactive position or oversimplistic. This is because of Watson's famous quote:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even a beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants (Skinner, 1959, p. 198).

Although strict biological theorists also reject Watson's claim of being able to shape behaviour into any outcome desired, as extreme, the statement inherently (portrayed in the phrase *healthy infants well formed*) implies that both biological and environmental factors such as are of equal importance in achieving proficiency in reading and all other learning. The process of conditioning such as teaching and learning, is therefore, of significance in the quest to develop language in kindergarteners and enhance their reading development. By implication,

learning theories emphasizes the role of training to help children develop skills in all areas including reading. It is in this context that the ecological system's theory become more relevant in portraying the more complex environmental factors within the child's self, the family, the school and the other layers of environments that contribute to shape and influence development for that matter KG learners' reading proficiency.

Ecological Systems Theory: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory focusses on how even the biologically based language development is shaped and developed by a complex system of relationship affected by multiples levels of the environment. These complex ecological environments include microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The *microsystem* is first environment which involves the individual Learner's own cognitive system, emotional system and body. *Microsystem* involves immediate environment that imparts on the child's thoughts, emotions and behaviours such as the family and school environment. The *exosystem* includes the community, society and the culture within which the individual lives while the *macrosystem* involves the general issues of the global world such as racism, LGTBQI+, terrorism, all of which can affect a child indirectly.

For the purpose of our study, we shall focus on the journey from the individual's biological make-up (*microsystem*) at which stage Chomsky's LAD (1957) seems to be prime for language and reading acquisition and through to the immediate settings of school and family environment of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system's theory (**mesosystem**) since that is more critical to the reading proficiency of the KG learner. The critical role of the teacher in this process assisting to enhance reading skills forms part of the environmental factors around the child's personal biological age and readiness. The other complex environmental factors around the child's sound health do not end with the teacher alone but may even reach the neighbourhood, community and the larger socio-cultural and political environments of Ghana as a country to influence kindergarteners learning. The blend of these two main theories of

Chomsky and Bronfenbrenner underscores the importance of the nature and nurture contributions in the reading and language development skill of KG learners. This study highlighted the significant role of the teacher, an agent of the mesosystem apart from the role of family in helping KG learners achieve reading proficiency for knowledge acquisition that can also help for the rest of their career.

The Ecological systems – Apart from the biological system that comprise the child's own cognitive (brain), emotional and physical health, Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the complex rings of systems all of which shapes the child's development. These include the meso (family), This is the critical environment that encompasses the connections between the home and the school (or early childhood education centre). This interrelationship is critical because although a child's informal education begins at the home or family level, the teacher's role is to formalize the learning process at the classroom by assisting the child to learn objects available in both the home and school environments and the letters that spells those objects out. The teacher further promotes the learning by letting the child carry what they have learnt in the classroom to their homes for parental involvement in consolidating the learning. This continual symbiotic interchange between the school and the home is what is considered most critical in the reading proficiency among KG learners. This direct mutual exchange though found within occasional broader environmental factors at the outward and global world is expected to be the primary factors that boost the KG learners' proficiency in reading.

2.3 Conceptual Framework of the Study

In the conceptual framework the individual child's proficiency in reading is the microsystem that bothers on the kindergartener's potential and aptitude to be proficient in reading. This aptitude can be actualized through a healthy interchange between the succeeding rings of environments as the child interchanges with his family (micro) and both interchanges with another micro environment of the teacher's teaching approaches (micro to meso). It

continuous with the child being affected by the teacher’s skills, competencies and knowledge (meso to exosystems) and finally terminates with the challenges confronting the teacher which may stem from all the environments (the entire ecological systems).

In summary, the individual KG learner is biologically equipped with in-born aptitude to acquire language and reading skills (as per Chomsky’s LAD theory) but requires the critical intervention suggested in Bronfenbrenner’s theory ecological systems theory (1995) of a school where a teacher with professional competence assist the ready KG learner with the necessary audiovisual, creative and artistic teaching approaches, assessments, relevant TLRs and manoeuvring the challenges to achieve reading proficiency.

In this regard, critical concepts that directly and indirectly affect the KG Learner includes the teacher’s approaches in teaching, the skills set and competencies of the teacher, the teaching and learning resources available for instruction and the challenges confronting both the teaching and instruction process from the teacher’s perspective.

As a result, the conceptual framework can be captured in **figure 1.1** below:

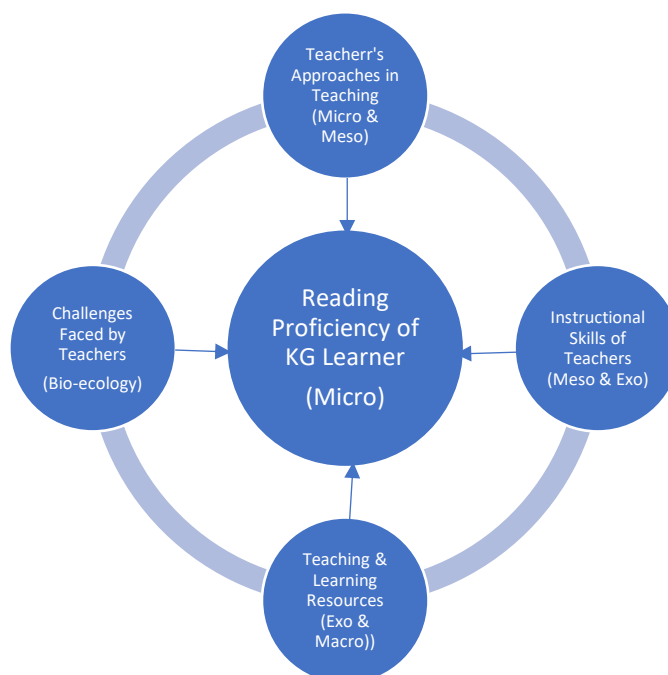


Fig 1.: KG learners' reading proficiency (microsystem) is a function of partial or whole combination of the ring of approaches in teaching (micro to meso-systems), instructional skills of teachers (meso to exosystems), TLRs available to teachers (exo to macro-systems) and teacher challenges (entire bio-ecological systems)

Since the theories seem to suggest that the KG learners acquire learning for that matter reading proficiency through their personal agency of language acquisition device (LAD) (Sobecks, 2020) as their readiness and the support of the strands of complex environments around them particularly the school teacher and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), there is the need to review available empirical literature in these domains. In reviewing this available literature, the role of a teacher in this process of learning and assessment in reading proficiency is going to be highlighted as the study aim and research questions have indicated. Additionally, however, the other support stake holders in the learning proficiency at the KG level such as the micro and mesosystem environments of family and the immediate neighbourhood conditions that imparts as well as the broader environments which indirectly affects the kindergartener shall be reviewed accordingly.

2.3.1 Role of the Kindergarten Teacher

It has been argued that in recent years the role of early childhood education stage has changed from a mere extension of the kindergarten stage to a much more academic instructional environment and therefore the teacher's role has also considerably shifted accordingly (Deyell-Gingold, 2006). Deyell-Gingold, (2006) further argued that apart from the KG Teacher's role of adopting the appropriate pedagogy for instruction and assessment in the classroom, the ability and skill to collaborate with all the other stakeholders to the early child education experience such as parents, other teachers and functionaries, and the larger neighbourhood surrounding the school and family is an important attribute and function that

constitutes a modern teacher's role. It is the quest of this current study to investigate the critical role of the teacher in boosting the listening (teaching) and learning protocols of kindergarten learners in public ECEs and how that is expressed through the reading proficiency during classroom instruction.

A competent discharge of a teacher's role facilitates teaching and learning to arrive at proficiency. All the attributes, skills and competencies that makes a teacher to fulfil their role in teaching and learning can be summed up as teacher's agency (Biesta et al, 2015). Although the ECE experience for kindergarten learners does not depend on the KG teacher alone, it is the effective deployment of the teacher's agency – the teacher's social skills, collaborative ability, knowledge of the background of the child and school environment among others that helps in making the process of kindergarten education more rewarding and successful for all.

Teachers' agency here implies all the organizational skills, cultural adaptiveness and the specific activities deployed by a teacher to encourage and influence kindergarten learners in the quest of achieving proficiency in reading and writing (e.g.s. Biesta et. al., 2015; Calvert, 2016 and Molla & Nolan, 2020). The appropriate techniques that are used to create a vibrant teaching and learning environment allowing KG learners to be proficient in reading, writing and drawing from their cognition are to be explored. For instance, when a teacher understands the mother tongue of the KG learner, the teacher is teaching, transfer learning into the second language is more efficient than otherwise. Further, how is that role conceptualized in the current educational curriculum and what pros and cons are associated with its implementation are important issues under investigation in the study.

Apart from the crucial researches done in the West like the United States and Europe as well as the East, Asia, there are equally critical studies done here in Africa and Ghana for that matter.

In Africa and Ghana for that matter, Oppong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023), undertook a study on the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in the teaching of literacy

skills among KG learners. The study which adopted an ethnography design and the use of semi-structured interview guide drew 12 participants from a population of 419 teachers out of 99 KG schools through the adoption of quota and convenient sampling techniques. Although the sample seemed relatively small, the researcher argued that since their sample were representative of the 6 circuits of the district, and the fact that participants true experiences were captured through the instrument used and the procedure adopted in data gathering, the study had validity and dependability of a good qualitative research.

Results from the study highlighted several impediments in the way of a teacher's role to facilitate teaching and learning among KG learners. Among the several impediments, two findings that bothered on a teacher's role at the KG level is the insufficiency of in-service training and the lack of continuous professional development among teachers. These two impediments are critical because even if a teacher was good when they started the teaching career, the stoppage of in-service training will retard the performance of that teacher. Similarly, the lack of professional development programmes can make a teacher's method obsolete and fall short of teaching standards when new teaching and learning approaches are being introduced.

Opong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) recommended to the Shama district Education Directorate to collaborate with headteachers of the selected schools to organize in-service training and also ensure a continuous professional development teacher for teachers to be abreast with current efficient practices and standards. This recommendation is critical because studies done in the West has identified considerable gains in reading proficiency among kindergarteners whose teachers are properly trained and certified for that role (Hooper, 2018). Hooper (2018) explored the training and certification policy of local or the state government and its possible effect on student learning. The study which was longitudinal research found among others that children who have kindergarten and first-grade teachers with

certification in early childhood education (ECE) experience greater gains in reading and even math compared to KG learners whose teachers have only elementary education certification.

The implication of this study is in synch with Oppong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) recommendation to train and certify teachers specifically at the KG level since that has a correlation with the academic gains of their KG learners. More studies are required to find the psychosocial factors that may contribute to this effect. However, since Oppong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun's (2023) study was limited to just one district of the over 200 districts in the country, it is not clear to what extent this finding can be generalized except to the specific district of the study – Shama District. However, since there is scanty data of the role of teachers in KG education in districts in Ghana, more research would be required to investigate the phenomenon among many educational directorates to find out how both teachers and learners are faring especially as teething problems are emerging in the implementation of the current standard based curriculum.

Another closely related study about the function of kindergarten teachers was conducted by Badu et al., (2022) in how kindergarten teachers assessed their learners in Kwanwoma District. The study which used a descriptive survey design sampled 131 trained early childhood teachers out of 438 in a simple random fashion. The researchers used descriptive statistics to analyse the data and found that apart from the fact that most kindergarteners exhibited skills in reading fluency, more importantly, their KG teachers were able to assess them on specific skills including oral language skills, pupils' alphabetic principles, phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, reading fluency and the handwriting legibility of learners. This goes to underscore the crucial role of teachers in giving assessment to their KG learners, without which there is no evidence of learning achieved.

It is quite obvious that this study seemed to have been done remotely therefore lacked the practical touch to have investigated the experiences of teachers in how they practically

assessed their KG learners in this changing SBC educational environment. Such a study would further involve a qualitative design in addition to the quantitative approach adopted by Badu et al., (2022). It is some of these issues that informs this study to study the definite role of KG teachers in facilitating reading proficiency among KG learners from the experiential standpoint of teachers in the field.

2.3.2 KG Learner's Readiness

Deyell-Gingold, (2006) cited the crucial study by the national Centre for Early Development and Learning in the United States of America where 3,600 kindergarten teachers nationwide reported that 48 percent of children had moderate to serious problems transitioning to kindergarten. The revelation implied that it is not automatic that all KG kids would be ready to enter kindergarten and cope academically. Teachers receiving KG learners to their schools tend to be more concerned about the children's skills in following basic directions, academic coping and ability to work independently. It has been noted that discrepancy seems to exist between the expectations of KG teachers and the skills of kindergarten children. Pianta and Cox, (1998), therefore, advocated that there is the special need for kindergarten teachers to collaborate with both parents and KG handlers in order to achieve a successful transition. This advocacy for kindergarten teachers to collaborate with parents and kindergarten caretakers is what constitutes the mesosystem environment beyond the child's individual microsystem.

It must be emphasized that kindergarten school readiness goes beyond academics. According to the National Education Goals panel, readiness included a range of dimensions, such as a child's health and physical development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language and communication skills, and cognitive and the general knowledge the child had (Rae, 2011).

In Ghana, kindergarten readiness is essentially based on the chronological age of the child (Ghana Education Service, 2019). However, the GES criterion expects that a child of 4

years would be biologically healthy in terms of their ability to listen to instructions without interruptions, ability to hear words that rhyme, ability to see likeness and differences in pictures and designs and words that match among others (Pesando, et al., 2020). In a situation where a kindergarten learner is found to be immature or “not ready” on the basis of some of the range of dimensions enumerated above, and therefore is being asked to wait until “readiness emerge”, Deyell-Gingold, (2006) argued that parents should resist it by asking questions. This is because, research has shown that prospective kindergarteners that are told to wait an extra year or more to fully be ready do not gain any academic advantage and the extra year do not solve any of the social development issues that caused the initial concern (Graue, 2001).

In order for education to be effective, KG learner readiness must be matched with academic curriculum. In the major debate of nature nurture issue, scholars argued against each other. Whiles proponents in favour of nature argued that development and readiness to learn was based on biological clock of the human body (Chomsky, 1959; Plomin, et. al., 1994). proponents in favour of nurture claimed that development and learning readiness was purely based on the environment (Lerner, 1978). However, research in subsequent years have proven that there is always a combinatorial relationship between nature and nurture to make one develop and attain readiness for the next phase of development (e.gs. Lerner, 1978). Indeed, Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory implied that the child has to attain a certain level of maturity to transition from the attainment of object permanence in sensorimotor stage before they become adept for multilingual capacity at preoperational stage (Piaget, 1926; 2000).

In a study by Majzub & Rashid (2012) that used random technique to select 377 children attending government ECEs, government agencies and private kindergarten in Malaysia, parents completed forms reporting background demographics and kindergarten teachers reported on children's level of school readiness using a multidimensional assessment. Results obtained by Majzub & Rashid, (2012) showed that children scored the highest in moral

readiness for school learning. Other studies have linked the critical role of child play interactions to their readiness to learn and has found that a significant relationship exist (Bulotsky-Shearer et. al, 2012).

To complement any dimension of KG learner readiness for kindergarten, Deyell-Gingold (2006) suggested that parents and KG handlers of children can make learners ready by the following: (1) Visit the kindergarten school with the learner to familiarize themselves with the place; (2) Find out the nature of the lunchtime and how to open new kinds of lunch box containers; (3) parents can read about kindergarten and discuss pertinent issues such as daily routine, closing time and number of children to meet there among others. In effect the KG learner's readiness for kindergarten school experience cannot end without the participation of parents from the child's home and the prospective kindergarten teachers the child is about to meet, an important mesosystem environmental interchange.

2.3.3 Home and Parental Support (Microsystem)

In the global world today, parents are encouraged to take active part in the education of their kindergarteners. Kindergarten programs therefore require parents' involvement both at the school and the home. Deyell-Gingold, (2006) stated that the National PTA of the US has noted that parent and family involvement in the child's school experience increases student achievement and success. This home and parental support in terms of active involvement in the KG learners school life through encouragement and praise for the children have been found to boost their self-esteem and confidence contributing to their success in school (Deyell-Gingold, 2006).

The home and Parents tend to form the foundation of children in their quest to begin formal education. It is a parent who would hand over a KG learner to an early childhood education (ECE) kindergarten teacher where formal instruction in teaching and learning can

begin. In effect parental support is critical in helping facilitate the environment that brings about proficiency in reading and writing among KG learners.

A study conducted by Fedina et al, (2017) suggested that it is not only child readiness that is required for successful kindergarten education but that a larger team of stakeholders including educators and parents' readiness. Educators and parental readiness seem to be even more critical in implementing distance learning interventions in KG education in parts of Europe (Fedina et al, 2017). The study by Majzub & Rashid (2012) also found that due to the critical importance of child readiness for formal instruction in reading and writing proficiency among kindergartener, disadvantaged parents would need support to become knowledgeable and practice positive parenting in creating the enabling environment that enhance reading and writing proficiency among KG learners.

This finding leads to the next important concept of the need for the larger community support that helps child, parents, educators and teachers to partner together in enhancing teaching and learning among ECEs, forming the mesosystem around the developing KG learners (e.g., Owen & Anderson, 2017).

2.3.4 The Family and School (Micro and Mesosystems)

Apart from the KG, school teacher and the parents of the KG learner in their academic experience, research is pointing to the great importance of social skills and adjustment within the larger environment of school, home, peers and friends in the neighbourhood as a critical factor for child's play behaviour and communication skills (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990). ECE centres where KG learners are taught to read do not exist in isolation nor operate in a vacuum but they exist within an area of other families, friends and neighbours and they operate in environments where other day care and play centres whose goodwill, interest and participation in the development of the KG learners to read is critical in determining the success of KG Learners reading proficiency.

The succeeding environments beyond the child's own microsystem of cognitive, emotional and body function endowed with language acquisition device (Chomsky, 1959) and the bioecological predispositions for development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), unto the mesosystem environment of the immediate home and family of parents and siblings, the school of KG Teachers and other kids. The involvement and participation of this mesosystem community is equally significant in the reading and communication skill proficiency of the KG learner.

A study to examine the state of community participation in KG education was conducted by Megersa et al. (2019). A survey design was used to gather data from 192 KG teachers, 58 KG principals, 12 cluster supervisors, 4 education experts and 58 PTA members. The study was supplemented with interviews and focused group discussion. Findings of this particular study revealed that participation of the community in early childhood education was very low. The community participation in the study was found in cash contribution and participation in a meeting to improve student behaviour.

2.3.5 Mesosystem and Exosystem influences on Kindergarteners

An important dimension of the study by Megersa et al, (2019) was the revelation of major factors contributing to the low community support. These included lack of awareness in the community, failure to attend meetings and failure for the community to send its KG kids to school. Megersa et al recommended that ECE centres should design effective strategies of cooperation to work with the community in supporting kindergarten education. Additionally, Megersa et al suggested that sustained effort should be made by ECE centres in the orientation and reorientation of community members about the scope, objectives, principles and programme of KG education.

The community involvement can also be boosted by government support by formulating the broader framework that creates the enabling environment for teachers, parents,

community and the kindergarten kids themselves to work together in a symbiotic manner to achieve proficiency in learning at the critical foundational stage of the KG level. For instance, in a study by Owen & Anderson, (2017), the important role of parenting children appropriately received political support due to the fact that poverty tends to have an adverse impact on present experiences and future life chances on young children. In order to find more factors associated with the situation, a phenomenological study was undertaken to explore reasons why some parents who live in poverty tends to access informal social support networks of community-based toddler groups. Owen & Anderson found that when parents avail themselves to these networks, they get value for their mental wellbeing and peer education both of which support their ability to parent their young children more appropriately.

2.3.6 Teacher Challenges (The Entire Bio-Ecological Systems)

Although teachers are the main direct stakeholders in the quest to educate KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency, there are several other stakeholders whose activities, omissions and commissions have indirect impact of the goal of enhanced reading proficiency. For instance, parents and family members of the kindergartener who form the micro environment may refuse to assist the child with the necessary learning materials or fail to assist the child in the performance of his homework all of which can become a challenge to a teacher in the achievement of the goal of reading proficiency. Similarly, when neighbours, school and the community within which the child lives is riddled with impediments like lack of portable water, unavailable health care system, inadequate educational facilities or unavailable amenities such as food markets, these may directly affect the teacher who has been posted to a community but indirectly affect kindergartener who may not get the best of the teacher in terms of the teacher's skills and knowledge in teaching due to the break in concentration resulting from such problems (Oppong Frimpong & Woode-Eshun, 2023). In the same fashion, when the provision of educational infrastructure needed to train the teachers are below standard,

trained teachers would lack the requisite competence with which to discharge their teaching duties to attain reading proficiency for kindergarteners. Opong Frimpong and Wood-Eshun suggested for instance the need for continuous in-service training and continuous development for teachers in the Shama district in order to enhance their skills to train children at the basic level.

Finally, the values, laws and customs of the larger geopolitical system of the country has inherent problems, all those problems can become the personal challenges of an avid teacher who may be eager to discharge the role of training kindergarteners to be proficient in reading but become impeded by the macrosystem climate. For instance, unstable governments, tribal conflicts, civil rebellion and even wars within a country can hinder the discharge of a teacher's duties aimed at enhancing reading proficiency among kindergarteners. All these challenges can stem from the teacher's own self, the family, the school, the community and even the larger geopolitical environment making this challenge to be considered as emanating from the entire bioecological environment within which the teacher is expected to discharge their duties. For instance, in their study on kindergarteners reading and writing skills, the findings led Badu et al., (2022) to recommend that the Atwima Kwawoma district who represent the central government and by extension the entire geo political system at the local government level should undertake some motivational packages in the form of funding for quality teacher training and continuous development so as to update the skills set of teachers to fulfill the responsibility of training kindergarteners in reading and writing proficiently.

2.4 Synthesis of the Literature Review

Studies have highlighted the varying but important roles of all the stakeholders in enhancing education. Among these stakeholders are teachers whose organizational skills, cultural adaptiveness and the specific activities deployed in the school setting can influence

KG learners in the quest of achieving proficiency in reading and writing (e.g.s. Biesta et. al., 2015; Calvert, 2016 and Molla & Nolan, 2020).

Secondly, it has been found that the readiness of the learners is equally of critical importance to the achievement of reading and writing proficiency kindergarten learners in ECEs (e.g.s., Bulotsky-Shearer et. al, 2012 and Majzub & Rashid 2012). However, KG learner readiness cannot be achieved without the critical involvement of parents who are the foundation upon whom the child first stands on in terms of their development psychosocially and educationally. As found by other studies, KG learner readiness can only be guaranteed when parental readiness in terms of their knowledge of KG learners educational needs and their total support to help achieve it is in place (e.g.s., Fedina et al, 2017). Here again, parents' readiness to fully avail their KG kids to the early childhood education system and totally support them in terms of financial and moral support can be enhanced if the community within which both parents and children live have goodwill for kindergarten education and social support systems that can assist the KG kids, their parents and even the teachers who facilitate learning. Such was the trend that studies conducted within recent times seem to be pointing (e.g.s., Megersa et al, 2019 and Owen & Anderson 2017).

Additionally, the political will of the state and government policy is also important in the realization of the goal of enhanced and efficient early childhood educational systems within any jurisdiction. The development of the right educational systems and periodic reforms to fine tune it for efficient and better ECE outcomes also depends on the provision of the necessary infrastructure and the day-to-day teaching and learning resources to make the enhancement of ECE a reality. Sometimes, the political will has multiple effects on both the community, parents, teachers and the KG learners to work together as stakeholders in a harmonious and resourceful fashion. This multiple ripple effect was also alluded to in the studies implicated above (e.g.s., Megersa et al, 2019 and Owen & Anderson, 2017).

Having identified the critical stakeholders and the various roles they can play to achieve enhanced reading proficiency among KG learners, it must be emphasized that, there is a coordinating handle that can serve as the practical leadership in the classroom of ECEs in the form of teacher facilitation which is drawn from a teacher's agency to harness the strengths and contributions of all the various stakeholders in achieving proficiency in learning among KG learners.

The two critical theories in Ghana reviewed builds the momentum to gather data of early child education experience and kindergarten schools from districts to district bases in order to unravel the overall challenges, teething problems with regards to the implementation of the new standard based curriculum for instance and make appropriate recommendations and interventions for efficient and progressive educational development. Opong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) findings reveal the need to look at class sizes among, Kindergarteners, train more specialized KG teachers, conduct regular in-service trainings as well as continuous professional development among KG teachers.

Indeed Badu et al., (2022) also made recommendation for further training and professional development to enhance the efficiency of the performance of the KG teacher in fulfilling their role in pedagogical instruction and assessment. Both studies by Opong Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) and Badu et al., (2022) intimated the need for the larger environmental powers such as local education directorate as well as the Central government in some cases to help with infrastructure and the ready provision of all necessary teaching and learning resources to augment the work of the teacher. For instance, these findings and recommendation should be of great support in the current situation in Ghana, where the education ministry has implemented the new curriculum reform known as the standard based curriculum (SBC) with the quest of improving on teaching and learning in the school particularly ECE. Although it is laudable and calls on all the key stakeholders to participate in

its implementation whether under the old curriculum or the new, it still hinges on the invaluable coordinating role of teacher's agency to facilitate all the strength to achieve the outcomes of enhanced teaching and learning in reading particularly at the KG level.

Unfortunately, as it stands in Ghana today, latest study done by Arthur and Obeng (2023) on establishing teachers' readiness to efficiently use the teaching strategies employed in Ghana's Standard-based curriculum to achieve the ultimate outcome of learners' lifelong learning, results were not encouraging. The study found that after four to five years of its implementation, only 44.2% of a 400-sample size of teachers across Ghana were fully ready in implementing the SBC reform.

And as indicated in Hooper (2018) study, the requisite training and certification for teachers at the kindergarten level should be factored into the new policy to help improve the teacher and the discharge of the roles more effectively as well as achieve the academic gains of the learners at the kindergarten level and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to address research setting, the research paradigm, sample, research setting and sampling techniques as well as the instruments and procedure for data collection in the study. It begins with the introduction of the research setting and design. Lastly, the procedure that was adopted in collecting the data will be outlined alongside the ethical considerations and standards for quality research.

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Akuapem South municipality (ASM) in Aburi within which the Akuapem South Municipal Education Directorate (ASMED) is located. The whole municipality is better known by its historical and famous name of Aburi which has several towns and villages within its historical catchment areas. The Aburi Community spans from the South with towns like Brekuso and Peduase through Kitase, Gyankama, Konkonuru, all the way to the North at Awherease. It also spans from the East with communities like Adamrobe, Jamaicaso to the west with Pakro, Kwesi Doi, Pokrom and several other towns and villages. This setting is of great historical significance to the nation Ghana because it hosts one of the largest botanical Gardens in the country established in 1890 in Aburi which receive an average tens of thousands of visitors per annum generating income for the municipality. Akuapem South is located in the Eastern Region on the Akuapem ridge mountains between latitudes 5.45 N and 5.58 N, and Longitudes 0.0W and covers a land area of about 224.13 kilometres square. (GSS, 2014). This range of communities is referred to as the Aburi mountains. The common language spoken by the citizens is Akuapem Twi. Within the communities in the municipality are few that are pretty fortunate communities while majority are deprived with poor health provision centres, poor sanitation and other social amenities. The common economic activities

in the area includes farming crop and animal farming and Arts works that are marketed in the Arts village near Aburi Girls SHS.

To further justify my interest in the research area of Akuapem South, I observed that having taught in the KG for over twenty years within three regions, I found that KG outcomes in the study area was relatively poorer than the earlier places I have gotten involved in. Furthermore, while participating in a durbar of stakeholders of education involving teachers, education directorate, school management committees, traditional and local government councils all presenters with the MCE climaxing it with his address of the durbar, stated categorically that the poor results could be attributed to the poor reading culture traceable to Early Grade foundation – the KG Level (*Source: Field Research in Akuapem South Municipality*). After searching to find empirical research done in the municipality about KG education and the teacher's role to no avail, it became necessary that conducting an investigation into the phenomenon was paramount in ASM to diagnose the problem and propose interventions and recommendations that could remedy the situation.

3.3 Research Paradigm

Among the Humanities, the disciplines of education, psychology, educational psychology and early childhood education (ECE), abounds with several methodological approaches involving research into qualities, quantities, mixed, cross-sectional or longitudinal approaches. The quest for the best methods in research is to unravel facts that would inform transformative interventions for poor and underperforming communities in education for example (Gough, 2017). Madill et al., (2000) identified three epistemological positions on a continuum namely realist perspective, contextualist perspective and radical constructionist epistemologies. The realist perspective on one end of the continuum suggests that knowledge preexist therefore controlled observation and measurement can be adopted to discover it. At the other end, radical constructionism perspective contradicts the realist position claiming that

knowledge is purely a radical social construction in the world (Madill et al., 2000). Due to the need for insights and depths of knowledge required in addition to general statistics, there is a recent surge in the use of mixed method approaches (Agyei, 2020).

In Education and Psychology today, qualitative methods are becoming increasingly helpful due to its ability to delve deeper into differences in knowledge and identities within communities and how that can be used to achieve improvements in underperforming schools in education in the community (Nelson & Evans, 2014). This study has traces of both the realist as well as the radical constructionist positions making it to be construed as both social constructionism and realism. This makes the research paradigm being adopted for the study to be interpretivism since the knowledge construction and interpretation of participants and the researcher comes together in the gathering of the qualitative data.

3.4 Research Design

Due to the quest to explore the study phenomenon of how teachers perform their roles within the context of Akuapem South municipality in the Eastern region of Ghana, the researcher decided to undertake a qualitative design using phenomenological investigation about how KG teachers within the Akuapem South municipality become qualified and carry out their role as teachers among the KG Learners. The study therefore adopted a phenomenological design to gain understanding into the subjective and intuitive meanings of how teachers construe and undertake their duties in the KG classroom experience. The individual understanding and interpretations of the main stakeholder and facilitator in the KG Classroom which is the teacher would be sought through comprehensive interviews, and checklist observation. The approach is expected to dig deep into the specific teaching methods whether it centers around *demonstration, sounds, role play, recitation, phonemics* or *segmentation*. The researcher adopted bracketing of fore-conceptions to minimize biases and allow the research participants to reveal the experience as it actually is. This is to make

interpretations and analysis of the phenomenon come out in a credible research quality. Also issues about the instructional knowledge and skills-set of the typical teacher in the municipality, teaching and learning resources as well as the challenges facing teachers with regards to teacher's responsibility were all explored. These data were sought through in-depth interviews with the practitioners themselves being teachers who deal with kindergarteners to achieve reading proficiency. Also, gaining insight into the crucial role of teachers require interviews with the teachers themselves and how their construction of knowledge has been shaped by language and the particular culture of Akuapem South within which they teach KG learners. This brings to the fore again the current **municipality** under study requiring the right sampling techniques that yields desirable in-depth knowledge outcomes.

3.5 Sample Area and Sampling Technique

The Akuapem South municipality has thirty-five (35) basic public schools, each of which has an early childhood centre with kindergarten facility for KGs 1 and 2. The average number of teachers in a KG class is 2 with the exception of few classes which has only one teacher. These kindergarten teachers have qualifications ranging from Diploma to bachelor's degrees. Out of these 105 KG teachers only one (1) is a male. The total number of kindergarteners in the ECEs in ASM is 820 males and 808 females making 1,628 kindergarteners in all (*Source: ASMED, 2024*). The KG teachers who handle these number of KG learners are 105 with 104 females and 1 male. In order to fairly spread the study in the municipality participants for the study were purposively settled on in the municipality. A total of 12 participants whose input yielded a saturation were selected. A total of four (4) participants came from the Aburi circuit alone because the number of teachers within the Aburi circuit are more than double compared to the teachers in each circuit. Specifically, Aburi KG teachers alone constitute 40 teachers of the 105 teachers in the entire municipality. As a result, the participants of KG teachers selected for the study were 12 in all.

After purposively settling on the 12 KG teacher participants from the five circuits, Convenient technique was adopted whereby to engage the most affable participants for the study. When the two teachers are found within the circuit among all the schools there, the interviews were conducted conveniently with the teachers who are more articulate about the issues. Although a gender balance of 1:1 distribution was sought, that was not achieved since the majority of kindergarten teachers within the municipality were females. In the end, all participants were females. In order to achieve views from both genders, a conscious effort was made to involve the one male participant in the study but it proved fruitless as he was not available to participate in the study.

For the purpose of being illustrative about the study area, find attached figure 1 below a graphical political and administrative map of the research setting, Akuapem South Municipality:

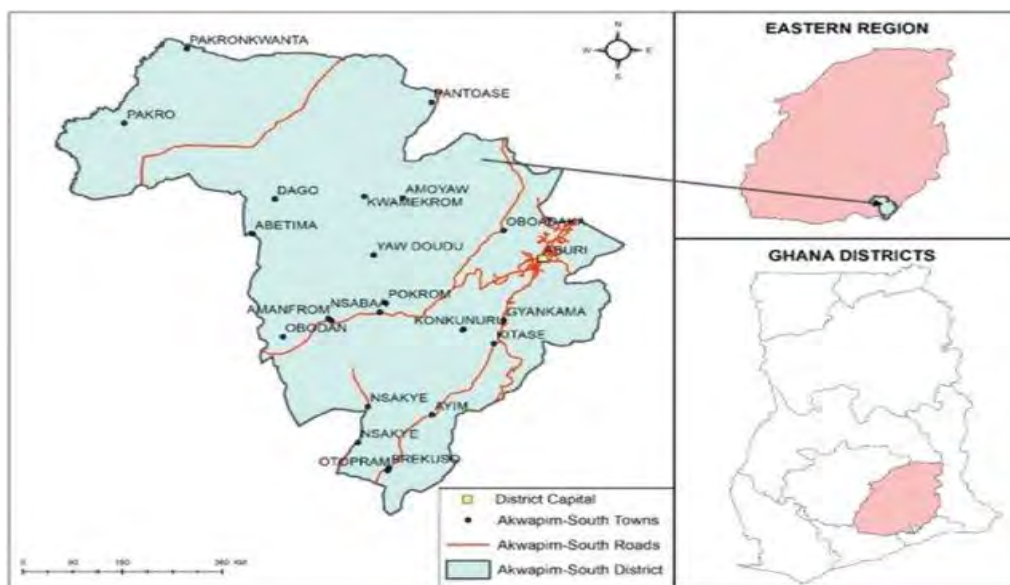


Figure 2: Map of Akuapem-South Municipality (the study area). Source: Geography Dept. (University of Ghana), 2020

3.6 Instruments and Procedure for Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed involving the role of teachers, and the pedagogical approaches being adopted to instruct learners. See Appendix 3 for the *Interview Guide for Role of Teachers and Other Stakeholders in Kindergarten Education*.

After selecting participants from the municipality, each of them was engaged in an interview process that lasted an average of 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Almost all the interviews took place in the school environment in the case of teachers. Particular observations of the school premises and home whether they are conducive to kindergarteners in their reading proficiency were taken notice of. Also, a checklist of the teachers' instructional skills was developed to rate participants reports of their professional competence in the semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix 1.G). A teacher's role and function would have positive impact on the teaching proficiency and, therefore, items in the data collection interview guide included teachers' understanding of the current Standard base curriculum (SBC), learning materials, rationale of the SBC, philosophy, general aims, specific aims, teaching and learning expectations, and core competencies of individual teachers.

Since the interviews and study were conducted within the school premises, the researcher took the opportunity to observe the teacher as she teaches and how they organize their classroom to facilitate learning among the KG learners by the use of the teacher instructional checklist. Also, researcher observed the classroom conditions, school compound and the general atmosphere within which KG education occurred by ticking a checklist as part of the semi-structured interview Guide.

The research and data collection procedure also involved acquiring an ethical clearance from the Graduate School's ethical committee on the confidentiality, informed consent and other participant rights of the study. Also, sending of letters of introduction and application for participants for the study were used as the case required. After, time was scheduled for data

collection with participants. Before the interview, I as the researcher and investigator introduced the purpose of the study to the participants and invited them to give their response to the questions in an open-ended fashion candidly to help obtain factual data for the study. Participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that their views and experiences are freely being asked for the study to gain understanding about the role of teachers in reading proficiency among kindergarteners. Below is table 1, a brief fragment sample questions found in the semi-structured interview guide instrument: The whole interview schedule can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Sample Questions of Semi-structure Interview Guide

Sample Questions with Participants

1. What are the specific teaching approaches adopted to instruct the KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency? (**Probe** into how each of the approaches are used and to what extent they are used)
 - i. Demonstration:
 - ii. Sounds:
 - iii. Role Play:
 - iv. Recitation:
 - v. Phonemics:
 - vi. Segmentation:
2. What are the specific teaching approaches adopted to instruct the KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency? (**Probe** into how each of the approaches are used and to what extent they are used)
3. What are the specific teaching approaches adopted to instruct the KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency? (**Probe** into how each of the approaches are used and to what extent they are used)

4. What peculiar challenges in your view is confronting the KG teachers like yourself in this school and how do you think they can be resolved?

3.7 Pilot Testing

To better fine tune the instrument and process of the study, a pilot test was conducted using the designed semi-structured interview guide to find the views and experiences principally of teachers themselves as well as some of the stakeholders in relation to the role teachers play and the phenomenon of reading performance among kindergarteners in the Akuapem South Municipality. Also, the interview guide was used to solicit the views of a parent and two other community members who are interested in early child education in the district. The outcome of the pilot test helped to finetune the semi-structured interview guide. For instance, it was found that although the role of the teacher in reading proficiency is what is being investigated, it was still necessary to include questions that bothered on the support structures of parents and find other support systems from family members and significant identifiable groups within the immediate environment. Other members in the school environment like neighbours who form part of the interested mesosystem actors are known to assist early childhood education and for that matter attaining child reading proficiency. This preliminary approach helped shed light on what adds to the challenges of teachers should that support from the other stakeholders be not forthcoming. Although the pilot study was conducted in ASM, those used for the pilot were not engaged for the substantive study.

Although the study was to be anonymous in nature, pilot study also encouraged the researcher to include vital demographic information that may aid in further analysis in explorative research of this nature. As a result, social demographic information including items like age, school, circuit, educational level of teacher or parent as the case may be etc are included in the semi-structured interview-guide.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The topic of investigation, the objectives and the methodology were sent to the ethical committee of the university through the Department for Early Child Education and faculty of Education in the University of Education, Winneba. The panel review on the protocol ensured that the study considered the rights of participants whose views are being solicited and therefore, anonymity, confidentiality was guaranteed for participants. Also, informed consent was obtained from all participants before the investigations are carried out. The participants were also made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study if they so choose. The board insisted that the protocol should guarantee the rights of participants in terms of being treated anonymously, their responses held in confidentiality with still their rights to withdraw at any stage of the study if they so choose.

3.9 Individual interviews with Participants

The process of the interview was outlined to each KG teacher. Participants were notified that all interactions were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. In the interview schedule, the participants were required to give at least a verbal consent that they were willing to participate in the study after all the participants information has been briefed them. I as the researcher was to facilitate the interaction through the asking of important questions based on the topical issues bothering on the teacher's role and KG reading proficiency. Although I was the interviewer in this interaction, my views were not what was being sought. Rather it is the views of the participant, the interviewee whose views were being solicited. Participants were assured that there was no wrong and rights answers or responses to the question. Every viewpoint expressed was valid and valuable since it is that view that is being sought in the research. The questions were asked in an open-ended fashion such as: *What are the specific teaching approaches adopted to instruct the KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency?* The participant was permitted to express all their views verbally which was audio

recorded. The only time I as the researcher intervenes is when I have to focus participant on the topic of discussion instead of going off into tangential and unrelated issues. When the topic is adequately exhausted, I introduced the next topic of interaction on teaching and learning resources, the knowledge and skill set of teachers (qualifications) or the actual challenges faced by the individual teacher in discharging their responsibilities in the classroom.

Since these participants were actual KG teachers in the classroom, they had the competence to speak on the roles they play in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners. After exhausting all the topics of the interview schedule, I debriefed the participants by expressing thanks to them and asking whether they have any final or closing remarks they might want to express about the topic under discussion. When the closing remarks are made, I assured participants to call upon them for further clarifications should the need arise as well as indicate my commitment to treat the data with all the confidentiality it deserves and use it purely for academic purposes.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data collected through interviews of all participants comprising teachers of kindergarteners were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Also, important environmental and situational context of both school and home environment considered crucial were identified and reported on. These transcripts form the qualitative data and they were coded and duly analysed.

The number of stages outlined by Braun and Clark (2006) under reflexive thematic analysis was adopted and used in a flexible manner to guide the data analysis process. The process of analysis by Braun and Clark was implemented in Table 1:

Table 2: Sixfold Steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

S/N	Step	Specific Project
1.	Familiarization with the data	Firstly, I transcribed the audio-record of the interviews and read it at least twice to give me a complete overview of all the material. I immersed myself into it with an analytical perspective while taking notes
2.	Generation of Initial Codes	Here, I didn't code everything I read. However, I formed pithy categories that are relevant to my research questions.
3.	Generation of the first Themes	As an inductive approach I generated themes based on my data and categories. I also grouped the codes and categories into clusters, where each cluster became a theme around subthemes.
4.	Review of Themes	Once I finalized my themes, I created mind-maps featuring themes, subthemes and categories to ensure they form a coherent overall picture. Here I ensured that each theme encapsulate multiple categories and that there is sufficient data supporting the theme. Here I went back and forth to rephrasing and rearranging structures.
5.	Definition and Naming of Themes	I wrote detailed description for each theme and finalized the specific designation for each theme. Here again I reverted a step or to reconsider and rephrase themes to make them specific enough

6. Writing Down of Findings Here, I drafted my report. As an academic paper, I aligned my motivation, research questions, results and finally discussed them with existing literature in the discussion chapter. The writing phase was captured under three chapters namely methodology, Results and Discussion chapters. In the methodology, I cited Braun and Clark's (2006) steps of analysis. In the Results section, I introduced all the themes, explained them appropriately and provided quotes from the data to substantiate outlined each theme. Finally, in the discussion section I discussed the themes in relation to existing literature.
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To ensure the trustworthiness of these qualitative data, checks on transcripts and generation of categories, themes and writing of findings were subjected to quality checks as follows:

3.11 Trustworthiness of Data

First the quality of the transcripts was double checked comprehensively to ensure what was said is what was recorded and transcribed. This process involved listening to the audio recorded interviews and reading the transcripts to ensure that they tally together. This also helped to familiarize myself with the transcripts and in the process made summary notes about each participant's data. In situations where some minor procedural absences were found such

as failure to capture some demographic data of the interviews with some of the participants, follow-up calls were done to fill in those gaps.

Also, it is worth noting that not everything in the interview guide was strictly followed. This was to minimize the mechanical tendency of the study which might make participants apprehensive. Rather, the interview process was relaxed to inspire comfort and boost the rapport with participants in order to obtain important data for the study. However, I endeavoured to ask all the key questions that would elicit views on the role of teachers, the home of family and other active mesosystem agents. For instance, some of the participants who were parents in circuits that seemed more deprived were allowed to speak in the vernacular to express their views more eloquently. This was translated and transcribed accordingly.

In order to achieve trustworthiness of qualitative data, different approaches and strategies were adopted in analysing and presenting the qualitative data (Gervais, et al., 1999).

In order to ensure that the interpretation of data truly reflects the study phenomenon, Gervais et al. suggested that internal validity in quantitative methods is equivalent to credibility in qualitative methods. Guba (1981) also suggested that qualitative transferability is equivalent to quantitative generalizability. Thirdly Guba argued that qualitative dependability is achieved to serve as a measure for quantitative reliability. Fourth and finally, Guba concluded that objectivity in quantitative study is achieved through achieving confirmability of qualitative data in the research. For instance, in the current study, confirmability of the data was achieved when I submitted my results to peers, faculty members and principally my supervisors for their feedback and inputs. Concerning credibility of the current study, I immersed myself into the issues bothering KG teachers with regard to their learners in the Akuapem South municipality by consulting all the relevant stakeholders in one way or the other. The pilot testing conducted by the use of the semi-structured interview guide with significant stakeholders eventually helped achieve the dependability of the instrument for data collection. Finally, the immersing

of myself with the literature of KG learners and their teachers makes the study transferrable to teachers in the same KG contexts.

In this study, I adopted the absence frame work proposed by Gervais et al., (1999) in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data, analysis and interpretations. Gervais et al., (1999) highlighted three types of absences in social science research. In my study it represented theoretical, methodological and interpretative absences. The researchers indicated the scope and nature of the absences and the recommendations to avoid them to strengthen trustworthiness, reliability and credibility in qualitative research. Gravitas et al., (1999) regard theoretical absence in threefold situations namely inadequate theory, partial conceptualizations and inevitable outcomes.

In guarding against these, I chose an all-encompassing theoretical framework in the form of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological systems theory which touches on the individual child, the parents and the home of the child, the teacher's role in facilitating formal reading proficiency as well as some mesosystem actors such as the community and environment that can all influence the process.

Secondly, methodological absence is regarded as not using responsive methods, inadequate sampling, unskilled interviews, limited time frame and/or low response rate (Gervais et al., 1999). These situations were guarded against by seeing to it that appropriate methodological processes and procedures were used.

Thirdly, analytical absence which Gervais et al., (1999) regarded as interpretative inadequacy where certain views and experiences are taken for granted by researchers during the interpretational analysis. This difficulty was guarded against by eliminating subjectivities and the potential researcher biases (Braun & Clark, 2006). Effectively the transcription and coding of transcripts were done with other independent analysts who are trained in thematic analysis (Braun & Clark).

After quality checking, transcripts were sent to a senior faculty for their independent assessment and even coding to ensure inter-rater reliability and the outcome was close to universal as well as high even inductively. The most crucial means of guarding against analytical absence was presenting the quotes and themes to my supervisor at different stages of the work. My supervisor audited and reviewed the codes and themes to ensure they reflect the realities of the participants within the schools. These helped reduce the researcher subjective biases that tend to confound thematic analysis (Braun & Clark 2006).

3.13 Theory-driven Analysis

Individual interviews conducted with teachers, and the observational reports in the checklist of teachers' instructional skills and school environments were integrated, and thematic analysis that is theory-driven was conducted, according to the steps outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001). With regards to answering some of the specific research questions, further analytical approaches were adopted as the case was. With the thematic analysis, the first stage involved listening and reading the transcripts repetitively to make the issues more familiar to me. This was climaxed with the development of a coding framework to guide the coding of the transcripts. In the second stage, the actual coding of all the transcripts was done according to the adopted framework as the main guide.

In my study, basic themes originated by drawing the basic similarities and linkages between both deductive and inductive codes generated. In the process therefore all codes became refined and transformed into basic themes through the associations and similarities they had with other codes. A typical example is the grouping of codes like *teacher's teaching*, *guiding*, *showing*, *instructing* and *tutoring* are grouped together into one basic theme as the teacher's instructional duty. After the basic themes, the next stage involves deriving organizing themes. Organizing themes is defined by Attride-Sterling (2001) as "the middle-order theme that organizes basic themes into cluster of similar issues" (p.389). In this study, all basic themes

were considered as groups of themes that gave a mid-level insight into study objectives. For instance, basic themes such as instruction, assessment and reporting are grouped under teachers' feedback. Also, teachers' engagement with the school management authorities, the educational directorate as well as other active community agents such as NGOs in connection with the kindergartener is grouped under teachers' agency and facilitation. Finally, global themes are considered as themes emerging from the aggregation of basic and mid-level themes that tends to cut across the views of other significant stakeholders such as parents, teachers themselves, educational directorate and empirical findings in the literature.

3.15 Summary of methodology

In this chapter, the research approach adopted thematic qualitative design to explore in-depth into the comprehensive role teachers play in assisting kindergarteners to achieve reading and enhance their reading proficiency. The process used to analyse the data as well as the techniques used to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative data have been discussed. The proceeding chapters findings are presented based on the objectives of the study and discussed accordingly.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to firstly present the demographic characteristics of the participants of the study. Secondly, the themes and subthemes that were developed from the dataset are also presented. Finally, extracts from participants forming those teams are presented and interpreted. Among the respondents of the qualitative data collection in the research setting, the following are their demographic characteristics and response to support level

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

Participant	Circuit	Age	Gender
KGT 1	NB	36	Female
KGT 2	NB	35	Female
KGT 3	OB	37	Female
KGT 4	PK	50	Female
KGT 5	AB	28	Female
KGT 6	AB	31	Female
KGT 7	KT	38	Female
KGT 8	OB	32	Female
KGT 9	KT	34	Female
KGT 10	AB	39	Female
KGT 11	PK	38	Female
KGT 12	AB	29	Female
Total			

Source: Field data from Akuapem South Municipality, (2023-2024)

A four-fold-research-question was adopted to guide this investigation. These were: (1) What are the approaches in teaching that helps enhance proficiency in reading among KG learners? (2) What instructional skills or knowledge do teachers possess in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners in ECEs in Akuapem South Municipality? (3) What are the resources available for use by teachers to enhance reading proficiency among kindergarteners and (4) What are the challenges faced by teachers in their quest to enhance teaching proficiency among KG learners? After the analysis a summary of categories, subthemes and main themes were found from participants narratives about the role of teachers in enhancing KG learners' performance.

Over here each theme is introduced and further explained to identify all of its associated concepts and issues. To substantiate the developed themes, quotes from the transcript extracts are also given under the relevant developed themes. In all five-fold themes were developed from the dataset including Jolly Phonics centred Teaching approaches, Teacher Agency (Knowledge and skill-set of teachers), Improvised Teaching, Learning Resources and Challenges and how research questions 1-4 is associated with reading proficiency among KG learners. Under theme 1 (Approaches), I identified categories and formed subthemes that included *use of teacher demonstration, use of jolly phonics, adoption of segmentation and syllabus*. Under them 2 (Teacher Agency/ Qualification), categories and clustered themes included academic qualification, professional experience and teaching philosophy. Theme 3 (Teaching and Learning Resources), categories and clustered subthemes included *non-commodious school environment, unavailable ICT Materials, inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs), and inadequate social and school amenities*. In terms of theme 4, which deals with the challenges reported by teachers, the ranged from non-supportive parents and communities within the mesosystems and inadequate support from the education directorate and finally unto the individual teacher's personal challenges. In order to answer the

final research question about the relationship between any of the factors involve in the discharging the duties of the KG teacher to enhance reading proficiency, three subtheme categories were found: (1) Non-supportive Parents retards reading proficiency; (2) non-supportive communities reduce teacher morale and (3) Inadequate Support from Education Directorate (TLRs) affects reading proficiency. These themes and subthemes are outlined in table 5 below.

Table 4: Summary of Themes and their clustered Subtheme categories

Teacher Role Factors	Themes	Subtheme Categories
Approaches	Research Q1: Jolly-phonics centred Approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of teacher demonstration, 2. Use of jolly phonics, 3. Adoption of segmentation and syllabus
Qualification	Research Q2: Teacher Agency (Knowledge and Skill-set)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic qualification, 2. Professional experience 3. Teaching philosophy
Resources	Research Q3: Improvised Teaching and Learning Resources (TLRs)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-commodious School environment 2. Unavailable ICT Materials 3. Inadequate learning Materials 4. Inadequate social and school amenities
Challenges	Research Q4: Collective Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-supportive Parents 2. Non-supportive communities

3. Inadequate Support Education

Directorate

4. Individual Teacher Challenges

Associations	Research Q5: Relationship	1. Non-supportive Parents retards
	between Themes	reading proficiency
	1-4 and reading	2. Non-supportive communities reduce
	proficiency of	teacher morale
	KG learners	3. Inadequate Support from Education
		Directorate (TLRs) affects reading
		proficiency
		4. Teacher agency enhances reading
		proficiency

4.2 Research Question1: What are the approaches in teaching that helps enhance proficiency in reading among KG learners?

In terms of the teaching approaches adopted by KG teachers to teach their learners, the main theme that was developed involved the use of jolly-phonics as a principal teaching model to boost proficiency in reading among learners. Teachers of kindergarteners naturally reported to the use of demonstration through play and singing to teach learners to pronounce and read letters and words. Additionally, the teachers used segmentation of a word into syllables to aid learners pronounce them. In terms of pedagogical approaches adopted by the kindergarten teachers to achieve proficiency among learners, the analysis revealed more teachers adopt jolly-phonics to teach learners phonemics, sounds and recitation to help learners learn letters of the alphabets, pronounce simple words and put them in reading basic sentences. This is what a participant of the study stated emphatically:

In our school, we use jolly phonics. It's an app that we downloaded from the play store. It's a literacy phone. It is phonics. In using teaching phonics, they have steps and levels to follow. ... It starts with the individual sounds and the letter sound (Kindergarten Teacher 1 [KGT1], F, NB Circuit 36 years)

KGT 1 reports with utter delight how the jolly phonics App that is accessible on play store on their phones makes the approach to enhance learners' proficiency better facilitated. The participant continued to elaborate on the utility they derive from the jolly phonics that apart from it being readily assessable through play store on their phones, the programme has a number of specific stages or levels that allows them to teach learners in a systematic and methodical manner from sounds to letter names, alphabet combination to form simple words etc. Due to the systematic nature of the Jolly-phonics programme, participant further outlined how she structures her teaching on daily and weekly basis to achieve reading proficiency with learners:

Each week we study one sound... in terms of identification of the sound, naming the sound, tracing and writing to identify it in words. If they see that sound in the word outside, they are able to recognize and pronounce it? When you take them through all these activities, they are be able to with a particular sound that they study for the week. (KGT1, F, NB Circuit 36 years).

She further emphasized how the sounds are considered as the first thing to introduce the child to, a thing that seems to be in line with best practices adopted in efficient teaching approaches:

Before you teach, you go to the sounds and they have stages how to upgrade them (KGT1, F, NB Circuit 36 years).

Another participant KGT2, itemized the systematic approach they adopt to teach sounds, then move on to letter names and further add blending of two sounds to develop the child's reading skill. She also stated:

The child has to be taken through [systematically]. Formally, we were only doing the sounds, but now we are adding letter names. So, you mention the letter name and the sound are the same. So don't go back. Learn the letter name. So, take on, you do blend, blending of two sounds (KGT2, F, NB Circuit, 35 years).

A third participant also emphasized the adoption of the Jolly phonics to be helpful in teaching the sounds of the alphabets as a foundation:

You use the sound for the phonics. Jolly phonics. So, for example, when you take alphabets a, the sound for the alphabet a is a. So, when you. You paste the alphabet card on the board for them and you ask them what letter is this? You ask them what letter is this? As they know the ABCD to Z, (KGT4, Female, PK Circuit, 50 years).

KGT4 considers the jolly-phonics teaching approach as a very foundational aspect to the learners' later learning experience since it adds the letter name to the corresponding letter sound from scratch, a practice that helps learners to pick up the basics as a fundamental step towards reading.

Participant 6 highlighted her demonstrative role in using letter cards, alphabet sounds and actions to teach her KG learners through to acquire the basics for pronunciation and reading:

I start by using relevant previous knowledge (RPK), what we learnt the previous days. After that, I go around the classroom. I point on the letters. Which letter is this? Then we mention, and what is the sound? They mention it and they do the action. And I ask them to go around and show me the same letter in the class. So, the learners will go around and point on the same letter. (KGT6, F, AB Circuit 28 years).

KGT6's approach underscores the importance of demonstration and involving learners to add actions to what they are learning intellectually and verbally. The aspect of adding actions to the pronunciations makes the learning experience both entertaining and reinforcing to teachers and learners alike. An entertaining teaching and learning experience make the classroom lively and causes learners to develop interest in learning so that even kids who are shy and those who earlier were not interested in formal classroom learning are all carried along to like classroom learning just like playground experience.

Study participant KGT5 places more emphasis on the importance of both teacher demonstration and learners being made to demonstrate what they learn as an essential foundation to achieving reading itself. She narrated how her approach in teaching involves the use of story-telling and the use of pictures on a chart to teach her learners as follows:

I use storytelling to teach them how to read. If I use the big book, I tell them maybe what do you see on the charts? And then they will show you what they also see on the chart. Then after that I'll ask them to be in groups and say what they saw on the chart. They should act like what they saw on the chat. ... So I will group them maybe two or three boots. Then I will tell them, oh, they are moving or chat the same thing. Maybe a face chat. Maybe a child is washing their face. I'll get them water; I'll get them a cup. And then the child acts like the way they are seeing on the picture. Yes. Then after that I will read what is under the chart to them... (KGT5, F, AB Circuit 31 years).

The adoption of story-telling by KGT5 excites learners' imagination to follow the story line which she devices charts that represents the important scenes and pictures dealing with actions and doing images. She then invites learners to perform such similar images they card through the story and can see on the charts. This adds to making leaning more of an experience than a passive reception of an auditory information.

Indeed, KGT8 considers jolly-phonics as good because it starts from story-telling. Out of the story-telling, the verbal narration, the scenes and photos that are evoked and engages learner's imaginations become crucial to carry learners along into the learning experience of beginning to read in her word 'tricky words'. She stated:

"Basically, ...jolly phonics...starts from storytelling. You tell the story and then you teach sound, just a single sound. Then we come to an action. So in a case where the child cannot remember the particular sound, you just do the action ... And it's also helping. We sometimes spell words, even without talking. We just have to use gestures and we have got the word. So how do you use pronouns in a word? So if we have a word like maths, you first mention math. But then we are going to do it very slowly to hear every single sound in the word. Then, in no particular order, every child gets the chance to mention any sound at all they heard in the word that we mentioned. So we hear somebody, starting from a head top, somebody will say, oh, there was I in it, I also heard. Then later, we rearranged, we blend, we pronounce the word. So if it is a new word that we haven't seen before, we will still use the same approach and we will teach tricky words which will not follow the order of the blending. Yes, tricky words."

(KGT8, F, OB Circuit 32 years).

According to this participant, a learner's ability to pronounce simple words and go on to learn tricky words is achieved when one adopts jolly-phonics from the story-telling stage through to all the stages of demonstration, sounds, phonemics, syllabus, segmentation, recitation etc. To conclude on the prevalence of the use of Jolly-phonics as probably the most widely accepted teaching approach adopted by many KG teachers, KGT9 had this to say about it after his years of teaching experience with KG learners:

“I've been teaching in the early grade for almost twelve years now and I can confidently say using jolly phonics would be the best approach in teaching reading. ... One workable approach for me will be the jolly phonics. I have used jolly phonics in my previous school and I can confidently say it has worked massively for us So, I can say that jolly phonics for me is very, super influential in teaching kids to read. And then when I came here, we use the SEBA, which is a very play based teaching strategy. And infusing this with my jolly phonics, I. I'm loving it because the results will speak for itself. And in all this, some of the materials are made by us, myself and my colleague teachers. We come together, think of what we want to do, prepare our own materials, a lot of them handmade. We use stories that are very relevant in our background, things that the children will understand. So, our stories can flow from every sound and it continues into the next sound” (KGT9, F, KT Circuit 34 years).

KGT9 narration also elaborates the rich nature of Jolly-phonics in leading to the use of all the sub approaches to facilitate reading among learners. However, the ability to use jolly-phonics as a crucial approach in helping learners achieve reading proficiency does not happen in a vacuum. The deployment of a teacher’s skills, knowledge set and agency cannot be sidestepped since it is the fundamental qualification that makes a teacher competent in the discharge of the role as a facilitator to enhance reading among learning.

4.3 Research Question 2: What instructional skills or knowledge level do KG teachers use in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners in ECEs in Akuapem South Municipality?

The current study yielded themes that bother on the agency or competencies of the teacher as crucial to their performance of their duty in the classroom. Under the Teacher Agency theme, subthemes and categories involving academic qualification, professional

experience as well as teaching philosophy played significant roles in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners.

Unlike the distant past when those who used to teach KG learners at early childhood education centres were pupil teachers with low training or merely Certificate A qualification, there is now an increasing emphasis on getting KG teachers who do early grade at the college of education with diploma or degree. Indeed, there are those who even have master's degree with specialization in Early Grade. In the current study, scores of the teachers who participated mentioned that they had early grade training while others specialized in early grade. One of the teachers indicated:

I've been in the service, the teaching service for 20 years now. Specifically, six years in early grade ... I've been here for six years and then my highest degree is first degree in basic education. I specialized in social studies. I did general by specializing social studies attend the UEW (KGT10, AB Circuit).

Definitely specialization in social studies coupled with six years of being involved with KG learners have added to the knowledge and skill-set of KGT10 who confidently affirms her competence in facilitating the learning of reading among her KG learners. Participant KGT1 affirmed that she was trained in early grade:

I studied early grade in training college (KGT1, F, NB Circuit).

While KGT1 touts her credentials of having studied early grade which has equipped her with the skills to handle KG learners efficiently, KGT8 focusses on a practical twelve years' experience in handling KG learners in the teaching approaches for which she has achieved considerable success in the process. She stated:

I've been teaching in the early grade for almost twelve years now ...I'm currently at this primary in KG department. ... I can confidently say it's worked massively for us to see results. (KGT8, OB Circuit).

KGT8 narrates the contributions of his relative long service of teaching in the KG has given her the skills and competency to teach learners and achieve results among them. The implication is that long service in the KG coupled with continual service trainings, workshops and seminars, participant has been equipped to know all the best practices in KG instruction. Her evidence to this effect is how she narrates of the massive improvements and results in enhancing her learner's reading proficiency.

Apart from academic qualification and service experience, other participants emphasized that their kind of teaching philosophy is at the base of their teaching. In other words, they go about their teaching at the KG level with the mindset to get learners read proficiently. KGT5 unequivocally stated that her teaching philosophy for her KG learners is to make learning a play experience:

My [teaching] philosophy is play. Like play. I teach through playing with the kids... Sometimes I just draw a line in the classroom. You shift this table; I'll draw a line. The lines that the children have been doing. So sometimes I write, I am going to school in the boxes. So I will say, then one person will jump on. I, um. Next person, um, um. Then the next person also jump on. That means they know what they are doing. I've taught them already, so they know it. And sometimes I am going to. And then they will jump. And then they jump on it here, then the others will jump on It there. Then going, going. Why? In a bit, going. Then the person will jump on it. I am going to make school. So, when we finish, I ask them to say what they are standing on ...So, the first person will say, I, have gone to school. (KGT5).

KGT5 is quite elaborate in expounding on her philosophy of teaching KG learners. She adopts play as a technique to instill literacy to her learners. In her narration when she draws a

line on the ground and explain it to them that entering into a space in it is moving from home to school and she asks a learner to jump into the space, the learner does and can explain that it implies they have moved from one place like their home to school. That is, learners learn that their actions in the classroom through a play situation implies the making of decision to do one thing and another. Here again, this teaching philosophy is effective in making teaching and learning lively and eliminating all forms of boredom from KG learners who have boundless strength and cannot stand classroom experience that does not incorporate actions, singing and play.

Another teacher expounded on her philosophy and approach in leading her learners to get reading success as follows:

They are acting themselves. So, if you come and grab, they will not really pay attention. So, you need to be in the lesson, be active. Let whatever you say come with action. Exaggerating when there's an aspect of being sad. Let them see us when you're happy. So, when you are into whatever you teach them, they will like pay attention. So, if even they forget what you say, your actions will ring a bell. ... It's also how to start with golden friendship with them. ... You have to befriend them, know where to discipline them. And if even you have to, you need to amend that relationship. You need to talk to them. You need to like let them know there are consequences for every action. ... Let them know what he did wrong or right. ... So if that trust is there and you the teacher, you are lovely like you are into the lesson, the child will get it. (KGT2,)

KGT2 describes a form of teaching philosophy that is akin to practical authoritative teaching learners. She emphasized how the teaching experience must be premised on having a golden relationship with the child and being involved with the learner through demonstration to get the learner's attention in the teaching. By golden relationship KGT2 meant a quality

relationship in which she added the teacher must reinforce the learners for the good things they do while punishing them for the wrong things they do. However, she insists you must explain to the learners all those actions so they would understand every choice has consequences. She further added that after disciplining a learner, the teacher must quickly amend their relationship with the learner so that no feud or tension develops. According to KGT2, this teaching philosophy will make the children understanding what she is teaching.

4.4 Research Question 3: What are the resources available for use by KG teachers to enhance reading proficiency among kindergarteners?

In developing theme 3, improvised teaching and learning resources, four subtheme categories were identified; namely, non-commodious school environment, unavailable ICT materials, inadequate learning materials and inadequate social and school amenities. In the current study the participants reported a range of logistical issues related to the resources and their management for discharging their responsibilities as KG teachers as one of the critical aspects of their work. These subtheme categories were reported on by participants in various ways. For instance, KGT3 reported that the unreliable dependence on the support from the office of the municipal directorate of education necessitates teachers to improvise their own means of devising teaching and learning materials:

We improvise [some of the materials] ourselves because sometimes you wait for them [Education office] to bring one or two things [TLMs] but they aren't able to fulfill those things (KGT3)

For many kindergarten teachers teaching and learning materials constitute a critical contribution in helping them assist the learners to acquire the rudiments of identify letters and alphabet names, adding letters to form simple words to reading simple sentences and so forth.

On the other hand, the unavailability of these TLMs can spell doom to the goal of achieving reading proficiency for KG learners.

KGT5 also corroborates the efforts of teachers in improvising some of their teaching and learning materials by devising it themselves:

We have cut out, out sounds that I've made even in the cupboard that maybe if I take letters a and s. If you blend it together, sometimes I'll pick two children or three and then I'll give them One card (KGT5)

However, there are other materials that are necessary for assisting the learners in boosting reading proficiency but are difficult to improvise. These kinds of tools include ICT materials.

4.4.1 Research Question 4: What are the challenges faced by teachers in their quest to enhance teaching proficiency among KG learners' materials?

The educational system must ensure that educational materials like stationery and other learning materials like textbooks are made available to schools and teachers to carry out their professional responsibilities. In this category individual teachers from different schools seemed to report differently as a result of their unique experience with the provision of such learning materials. While some believed the office provided all such needs, others were of a view that more needs to be done. For instance, one participant stated:

Oh, the office they are supporting. They are really supporting. Sometimes they come in to see whether we are on task. Oh, we have some of the materials (KGT3).

KGT3 seemed pleased with the education directorate by mentioning that they enjoyed support from the education ministry through their local government office in the municipality. In deed she even indicated that the office kept following up their teaching efforts and monitors their progress. Another participant KGT1, buttressed KGT3's assertion of enjoying some support from the education office:

And we have story picture books that they look through. You want more. They are getting old, so you want more (KGT1).

However, KGT1 was quick to add that they needed more of some of the materials like books and a replacement for ones that are getting old and worn out. As a result, teachers attempt to use their private resources to procure some of the materials, so they would be able to use such materials to teach the learners. A participant stated:

Sometimes you wait for them to bring one or two things they aren't able to fulfill those things. So you, the teacher, me personally I have to improvise and some of the things I have to buy it myself. For example, cello, tape, paper, glue and the rest I have to buy myself in order to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom (KGT3).

These varied views indicate that whereas some see the educational materials are provided, others think contrary, while others think more needs to be done especially as what is brought is not adequate and fresh ones are needed to replace old ones that have worn out.

4.4.2 Unavailable ICT materials

Apart from the usual TLM materials, charts, markers, glue cello tapes, cutters etc., that teachers due to their own ingenuity and agency can improvise by buying from their own resources to make their own charts, letter cards and object packages, there are particular information technology tools that are not easily improvisable and quite expensive in procuring from their own resources. Implying some materials can be improvised but not all. These includes basic ICT tools like laptop, mobile phones, bluetooth, amplify speakers, pen drives for accessing jolly phonics downloads for instance. As a result, teachers get hard-pressed to stretch their personal resources if they can afford it for such purposes. For instance, laptops are critical for jolly phonics teaching approach. KGT3 minced no words as she explained her ordeal to use her private money to buy some materials:

My own mobile phone, Bluetooth and sound system in the classroom is what I have to use” (KGT9)

Although this sacrifice speaks to an ingenious and dedicated teacher’s duty to teach their learners, it should not be overstretched since that can deplete the personal resources of the individual teacher and compound their economic and financial distress.

A participant established a strong association between how KG learners hear a sound and how they pronounce it. She stated:

“How they hear the sound is how they pronounce the word. So, like what you are saying was and then the sound is someone will say was and then it will sound like was” (KGT5, Circuit, Female, years).

Due to this situation the procurement of sound system and speakers or at least portable bluetooth is a necessity to help achieve the appropriate identification and pronouncement of letter names and sounds. In this scenario, if a complete sound system is even expensive to procure, a basic bluetooth device should be made available for the purpose of amplifying the sounds to make sound-learning easier for the learners. KGT7 was emphatic about the fundamental approach of phonics and the importance of learners hearing the particular sounds clear enough to be able to learn them effectively:

“We do phonics so in doing the phonics, we introduce the letter, ... After that, we let them rise, we do sounds, we mention the name of the letter, we use the sound of the letter in doing that, we use the reconnect to connect to the Bluetooth, ... the bluetooth to make the sound clearer for them to hear and they also imitate it” (KGT7).

However, due to lack of these ICT gadgets teachers think the teaching of sounds, letter names and word pronunciation is hampered in a way.

4.4.3 Non-commodious School environment

In order to carry out an efficient 21st century early childhood educational (ECE) facility, critical infrastructure such as school buildings with well-ventilated classrooms, equipped with toilet facility, portable water for handwashing and general sanitization must be incorporated. The school premises must be free from harmful conditions involving bushy surroundings that can breed disease causing insects and dangerous reptiles like snakes who can harm children. A good school environment must include social amenities such as toilets, the provision of clean water, safe playground and a relatively serene environment devoid of all forms of pollution including noise pollution.

Upon personal observation, with the exception of one or two facilities in the municipality, majority of the ECE centres have either small rooms in some circuits or extremely large classroom in some cases due to few patronages of KG learners. The school compounds are sometimes not completely safe from danger looking at the extent to which KG learners explore their environment, run around and would like to play even when learning. A practical example was an ECE facility in observed where there were standing iron rods on an uncompleted building adjacent to the school compound. In other ECE centres observed in NB, the bushes surrounding the facility was unacceptable to say the least since community members report of vipers and other reptiles have been found on the compound in previous times. Some of the teachers reported their challenge of very big classrooms while others complained of smaller classroom that necessitated that learners turn to see the board:

Just because the classroom is so big, learners have to sit and turn back to the blackboard while in other cases the classroom may not be big causing its own challenges as well. It is not easy at all (KGT4).

Another participant expressed the problem of feeding for the KG learners. This she explains make the kids want to leave the school compound to go to their homes to get food and return

to the school. The teacher lamented that, what is regrettable is that the child who promises to return after eating may not come back to the school again that day or may return after the lesson is over. She narrated:

We don't have feeding [in the school]. When it is break-time, they [KG Learners] would tell you, Madam, I am going home to eat. And they won't come back. Or even if they come back, by then the lesson is over (KGT1 Female, NB Circuit, 36 years).

This is perhaps one of the reasons why the government brought the social intervention programme of free feeding in deprived schools. However, this facility is still lacking in several other schools that are equally deprived.

4.4.4 Inadequate social and school amenities

The need of amenities such as toilets, clean water, safe playgrounds and serene classroom and school environments fitted to allow for adequate ventilation, classroom settings with attractive tables and chairs with many pictures and wall charts all for the purpose of stimulating learning.

While conducting the interview and observing the school environment, it was found that in some cases the water closet has been closed down due to lack of maintenance forcing the school to go back to their former method of pit latrine or KVIP. KDI ECE in NB circuit had this particular challenge. Although some of the areas had water, it was not necessarily on the school compound, so headteachers make some of the primary and JHS students to fetch some for the ECE on daily basis. Within the classrooms of some of the ECEs, the tables seemed too long for the learners as though the carpenter did not consider the age range of the learners. In some cases, the classroom is so big, with very few learners, a situation that can cause distractions for learners. Many of these observations were confirmed by teachers and sometimes community members. For instance, a participant in the current study reported that:

Sometimes when you are teaching, you find the table is too long for the learners (KGT12).

Such classroom conditions tend to hamper the effective teaching and learning in the classroom. Indeed, one participant requested for help when she reflected the condition of the desks and tables in their classrooms:

But our desks, our chairs are getting weak. Getting weak and broken. So we will need replacement. If there's any offer or help or support, we'll be so much grateful (KGT1)

4.5 Collective Challenges

In reporting about the challenges that affected teachers and the smooth teaching and learning in the classroom, it was found that some of those challenges bothered on teachers' expectations of parents, community within which the school is found as well as the local government education directorate that manages the education in the municipality. These challenges were found under subcategory themes including non-supportive parents, non-supportive communities, non-supportive education directorate and individual teacher challenges. This is what has led to the christening of the main theme as collective challenges implying the challenges fall within the complex environment from micro to exosystem environments.

4.5.1 Non-supportive Parents

Learners who are admitted for KG education are still infants that need adequate support from their parents if they will maximize the kindergarten education they are being offered. These parental supports constitute a key aspect of their readiness for formal education at the ECE level. However, in some cases, some learners tend to lack the full complements of their parents and guardians making their education quite challenging to teachers and the educational system as a whole. A participant in the current study identified the problem of hunger and

perhaps some unidentifiable conditions to the child that makes some of them to always sleep in class as an example:

The challenge is that the learner's readiness for learning [seems unavailable] as in some cases they are sleeping. Sometimes they are hungry. So ... at that time, if you ask them to sing their rhymes. If the person is hungry, will he be able to? (KGT7).

Nutrition is a key ingredient for cognitive function just as having adequate feeding, is necessary for concentration in the classroom. Also, a learner needs an alert consciousness to be able to focus attention on what they are being taught. These attributes cannot be procured without the active support of the immediate family of parents and guardians within which a child hail from. In this regard, parents who fail to demonstrate their full sense of responsibility by taking care of all their essential needs of the wards are considered a major challenge to teachers in particular and the educational process as a whole.

A participant explained her ordeal in not getting the support of parents to assist the child effectively with their homework. She narrated that when parents assist the child in the doing of their homework, they wrongly do it for the child or let someone do the entire work for the child, a thing which robs the child of their own proficiency. She summarized it as:

If you teach them today, they will know the next day. And sometimes I call their parents. I'm having their parents [phone number], so I call them and I'll be like, so sometimes when I give them homework, I'll write at the down do not write for her or do not write for him. Sometimes parents would not adhere to this advice” (KGT8).

Participants indicated that some of the parents, guide their wards at home in doing the home work:

We give them homework... At least when they get home, their parents are doing their work. They do not guide them from there (KGT1).

On the other hand, some parents also may not supervise or guide the child to do the homework at all so the child return to school the following day with an undone homework. In that case work must begin afresh since the work to be done was not achieved. It however, appears that more parents in trying to help their wards with homework commit this blunder of doing the work entirely for the learner instead of supervising them to do it on their own. Participant narrated:

They [Some parents] used to write it for them. But we have. We had a teacher, we talked to them that they don't have to the work for the learner. Right? (KGT1).

Participants explained that they therefore call the parents and advise them that their ward is able to do the work at school. It is only out of comfort and laziness at home that makes the child want to rely on their parents, so the parents should only supervise them to do it themselves. She stated further:

But when they come to school, they read and write themselves when they are home, [they want to be lazy]. You know, a child, when they are in their comfort zone at home, they feel lazy. ... But when they are home, see, the comfort at home makes not to read or write. (KGT11).

Participants insisted that they call parents one after the other and talk to them about this phenomenon so they can prevent doing their wards homework for them but rather guide them to do it themselves:

“So, we talk to their parents that their children are able to write at school. When they come home, they should ensure they are only guided to do the work not do it for the theme” (KGT2).

Other teachers reported that some parents are not assuming the full responsibility for their kindergarteners claiming that the government has made the education free. As a result, very basic things required like exercise books and work books they fail to buy some for the kids. Participant narrated that firstly such parents refuse to assist their wards with their homework and yet are not willing to incentivize a teacher or any individual who goes the extra mile to assist the learner to do their work.:

I sometimes spend on the learners from my own money but I don't have to send it to them to really take that money back. ... And sometimes it is obvious that the problem is coming from parents. And that is the kind of faulty ways that we use at home. You see parents use this government support as an excuse and fail to bring minimum support for the learner's education" (KGT11).

KGT4 is particularly of the view that some parents have a bad attitude about spending money to help their wards in KG education especially if they had to pay the money at school so the right books can be assembled for the. She was of the view that when books are procured for KG learners at the school some parents refuse to assume the responsibility of paying the money but when you send them to buy the book from the shop, they are able to find the money to buy it:

It's a problem. Somebody can be in the school for the whole year not having one exercise. Seriously. And you have been telling the parents to buy book. And just because there is financial problem. ... Years of everything is as they are doing in the pound. When they buy this from shop [for example, they'll find the money] If you ask the children to buy, My first copy book, they won't buy it (KGT4).

Some One participant was precisely eloquent in stating why the reading progress of wards are impeded in many instances due to the unwillingness of parents to assist their wards at home with their reading home works KGT3 stated:

The parents sometimes find it difficult to help the kids to perform any homework. That's when you give them any reading tasks for them to take home. The parents sometimes do not help the kids in performing the tasks of reading those tasks. So, whenever they come from home, they are not able to read well. They are not able to read whatever you gave them to send home for their parent to help” (KGT3).

Participants advocated as suggested in Bronfenbrenner’s multiple environmental theory that both teachers and parents must work in concert to assist KG learners to achieve reading proficiency:

The teacher has a lot of roles to play because when the kids come to school they are in your hands. Therefore, you have to do your best. The teacher has to do his or her best in order to enhance reading and learning. Because they are in your hand, you have to manage, have to find ways and means to help the kids to read very well. So must parents do well for the kids when they come home (KGT5).

Both teachers and parents must share the enhancement of reading proficiency role of KG learners as suggested by one participant.

KGT8 admitted that although there are several constraints and challenges in providing education for kindergarteners in order to enhance their proficiency in reading particularly, the biggest challenge seems to be the willingness of parents to fully get involved. She stated as follows:

And our big challenge will be with parental involvement. It's worked with one year group. You see, when their parents were massively helping us, they were doing better than the ones that we have with very little to no parental help. That would be a massive challenge. And probably some of the materials because we

prepared them ourselves. Yeah, we are tight on money and other stuff” (KGT 8).

In KGT8’ comparative observation of two different year groups of KG learners, she said she realized that the year group that they were able to secure parental involvement, the children did better in their reading. However, the year group that parents did not get involved, reading performance was difficult for the kids.

4.5.2 Non-Supportive Communities

Just as parental involvement plays a critical role in the education of kindergarteners in enhancing their reading proficiency, the bigger community environment embodying the school as well as the home play equally significant role in achieving KG learners reading proficiency and general literacy. Due to this acknowledgment by stakeholders in education, there is also the School Management Committee (SMC) that comprises the parents, teachers and community leaders to ensure that all impediments in the way of quality education is removed for learners to maximize the learning experience. As a result, this is a further expansion of the work of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to ensure that multipronged strategy is adopted to deal with educational challenges wholistically. This allows for referral of situation from the microlevel to the next higher authority when it is beyond the authority of one level. For instance, one participant narrated this situation that begins at the classroom level by discussing with their headteacher:

So, we discuss our issue with our head and then the head will take it to the PTA [if solution cannot be found at that level]. Then we invite the parents. I think that's where the SMC and the PTA and they come in there. So sometimes people, the SMC and the PTA channel, normally they also invite the parents. (KGT8).

When a matter is referred from the classroom level to headteacher and them to PTA until it reaches the SMC, other issues that fall outside the domain of the school and the immediate

community are discovered and the entire community leaders assist in solving the problem. In one such case, it is after the case referral to the SMC, that it was found that many of the KG learners do not live with their direct biological parents a diagnosis that helps in strategic community intervention to stem any menace associated with that.

Then we get to know that most of them [KG learners] don't live with their parents. Most of them are not living with their parents. (KGT8).

This kind of intervention which will definitely involve education is best done by leaders of the community within which the children live.

KGT1 identified an interesting phenomenon that seems to lie within the purview of the community and their attitude to education. In her experience since, teaching sounds and reading requires repetition and consistency anytime community events and behaviour take the children out of school for a week or two, KG learners return having lost all the foundation that was built before they travelled for a long funeral or got involved in a festival:

The teaching of sounds require consistency. Like if you don't do it frequently, they might forget. So, one sound, you have to hammer on it for several times. Repeat it, repeat it, repeat it. At times they forgot some things, but consistency is the best thing. So, for me, my challenges are to teach them and they forget. ... And that's the one person, two person, three person will not come to school. You come back and they forgotten. Maybe for me, find out from the family. At times, their moms take them to funerals, take them on trips. They are going to visit their grandmom or they going for an event somewhere. They [parents in the community] go with their children like a week or two weeks before. At times the children are not well ... and they stay home for a while. So when they return, certain things we taught them before they left are forgotten (KGT 1).

Participants calls for community participation in stemming this menace that make KG learners acquire reading skills and lose it due to a break of consistency when their parents take them away for long breaks due to funerals, farming, festivals or market activities.

4.5.3 Inadequate Support from Education Directorate

Participants also identified that the support from the educational directorate falls short of expectation. The local government authority in the form of municipal assembly and the education office must liaise with other institutions like the chieftaincy institution and the business community to raise more resources for the development of the ECEs since it forms the foundation of the education in entirety. For instance, one participant complained of an extremely large class for KG learners and yet small space as well as inadequate teachers who must take care of children who need assistance even in toilet training and caregiving.

I have some one or two challenges. That is my class is very more [than I can handle alone] whenever we are engaging one or two activities that will help to enhance reading for example, the kids to come together to read ... in groups. And when reading sometimes you have to display some of the cutouts on the floor for them to move around and pick and they will say it. But the class is very small to engage in such an activity. So, when it comes to that it becomes difficult to work towards that activity” KGT3).

Clearly, the school compounds and the classroom scenes require the intervention of the educational directorate and the local government authorities who have several approaches to adopt to resolve the constraints.

Also, to improve curriculum development and enhance best practices in today’s ECE education, it is the duty of the education directorate to conduct periodic in-service training, workshops and seminars apart from the necessary monitoring and evaluation of teaching and

learning at the various ECE school premises. KGT1 emphasized the responsibility of the office of education in the municipality. She recounted that in order to update our teaching processes:

The education office organized a workshop which was a paid workshop that we attended. Then they introduced the jolly phonics for the first time to us.”

(KGT1).

Participant admitted that if it were not for the education office, she might not have known how to apply jolly phonics in classroom teaching since it may not have been part of her training college experience. Thus, the office is crucial in bringing up to date methods and approaches through constant workshops, and refresher trainings as well as the provision of key infrastructure that makes KG education efficient.

4.5.4 Individual Teacher Challenges

It is important to acknowledge that while the KG learner is the object of the goal of reading proficiency in KG education, the teacher and his agency is also the direct subject who must be in direct contact with the KG learner. As a result, any challenge that personally bothers the KG teacher constitutes a threat to harming the achievement of the goal of reading proficiency. Although it can be argued that a teacher who loves her profession will use her agency, comprising her skills and experience to improvise and teach KG learners, that should not be overstretched to exploit poor teachers whose resources are constrained. One participant acknowledged this with regards to TLRs which are expected to be supplied by the office that fall short in arriving:

We improvise ourselves because sometimes you wait for them [education office] to bring one or two things, but they aren't able to fulfill those things. So, you, the teacher, must personally have to improvise and some of the things I have to buy it myself. For example, cello tapes, paper, glue and the rest I have

to buy them myself in order to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom”
(KGT3).

Just as parents are being called upon to be responsible for their wards, the Education office which dabble as the employers of teachers at the local government level must take full responsibility for their teachers and make available all the pertinent resources necessary to enhance teaching and learning at the KG level.

In another participant’s observation, the responsibility of teaching KG learners is very tasking that the unavailability of basic teaching and learning resources involving stationery compounds the stress on the individual teacher. In her words teaching sounds require consistency and focus and therefore to add the burden of having to procure the TLRs from one’s personal coffers is very challenging:

Well, [self-financing is] challenging. The teaching of sounds require consistency. Like if you don't do it frequently, they might forget. So, one sound, you have to hammer on it for several times. Repeat it, repeat it, repeat it. At times they forget some things, but consistency is the best thing. So, for me, finding money in addition to this existing challenge is unbearable. (KGT12)

Their job description and workload are already challenging there should be no additional stress laid on the KG Teacher.

4.6 Relationship between Themes 1-4 and reading proficiency of KG learners

It is obvious from the narrations of the participants of the present study that, the factors that influence the roles and function of teachers in the discharge of their duty shapes and impact the outcome of reading proficiency among KG learners. Significantly in this category, non-supportive parents tend to affect the reading proficiency, non-supportive communities negatively impact fundamental and progressive KG learning, inadequate support from the education directorate reduces teacher morale and negatively impacts learners’ reading

proficiency in the long run. However, teacher agency when it is in place and well harnessed positively impacts reading proficiency outcomes in the KG learners. The following is the results as portrayed through participant's responses.

4.6.1 Non-supportive Parents retards reading proficiency

From the current study, teachers who did not get the active involvement of parents in significant ways complained bitterly about being demoralized in their quest to help learners attain reading proficiency. This occurred in three particular ways. First the failure of parents to support the KG learners to do their homework by supervising the children to undertake their reading and writing tasks at home without doing it for them. Secondly, parents who failed to contribute the minimum financial supports to their wards educational upkeep in paying for their books and other stationery.

That's when you give them any reading tasks for them to take home. The parents sometimes do not help the kids in performing the tasks of reading those tasks. So, whenever they come back from home, they are not able to cope” (KGT3).

Since contemporary education is a team discipline, when parents refuse to get involve in assisting learners when homework is given from school, it hinders the goal of attaining reading proficiency.

Also, when parents renege on the responsibility to feed and pay the necessary bills for their children, the educational process is hampered in a way.

“Sometimes they [the KG learners] are hungry. So ... at that time, if you ask them to sing their rhymes. If the person is hungry, will he be able to?” KGT6).

KGT6 rhetorical question: *“If the person is hungry, will he be able to [sing their rhymes]?”* says it all. Non-supportive parents is a sure stumbling block in the way of attempting to enhance reading proficiency among KG learners.

4.6.2 Non-Supportive communities reduce teacher morale

Non-supportive communities take the form of the immediate child's family environment (*mesosystem*) and the wider societal environment of home, school and community (*exosystem*) not providing the enabling environment in terms of the availability of amenities, and necessary infrastructure and policy systems within the community that augments KG education. When a community guarantees peace and serenity, health and sanitation as well as safety of KG learners in and outside the school environment, these inure to the benefits of teachers and community as a whole engendering more productive teaching and learning leading to proficiency in general literacy and reading in particular. Sometimes the attitude of parents and behaviour patterns or customs in the community can hinder KG education. A typical example is what KGT1 alluded to about community behaviour patterns that places greater premium of funerals or festivals than education. She narrated:

At times, their moms (KG learners' parents) take them to funerals, take them on trips. They are going to visit their grandmom or they going for an event somewhere. They [parents in the community] go with their children like a week or two weeks before. ... So when they return, certain things we taught them before they left are forgotten (KGT 1).

This situation is clearly an unproductive custom and tradition in some of our indigenous societies which has hampered child education for centuries. KG1 has identified it as one common impediment in her community where she carries out her duty as a KG teacher but I may be widespread in other communities. Although funerals are important rites done to honour the departed loved ones, it should not be carried out in such a way that it jeopardizes the education and future of the succeeding generations.

4.6.3 Inadequate Support Education Directorate (TLRs) affects reading proficiency

The education directorate is the direct central government representative at the local level. They must be up to scratch in the day-to-day management of basic and advance education by ensuring the supply and management of logistics such as human resources, material resources and training and development of programmes to match modern trends of education. An education office that fails in achieving these basic goals demoralizes teachers who are their employees making them not to be motivated to achieve educational goals in the municipality. KGT3 identifies a problem which falls within the jurisdiction of the local government's education directorate. The size of the learners in relation to the classroom is woefully incommensurable. Participant clearly states that the classroom is extremely too small to carry out certain learning activities:

I have some one or two challenges. That is my class is very more [than I can handle alone] whenever we are engaging one or two activities that will help to enhance reading for example, the kids come together to read ... in groups. And when reading sometimes you have to display some of the cutouts on the floor for them to move around and pick and they will say it. But the class is very small to engage in such an activity. So, when it comes to that it becomes difficult to work towards that activity KGT3).

The negligence of the education office in ensuring that classrooms are not overcrowded is negatively impactful on what learning activities learners can accomplish. However, it can have other health implications on the learners and the teachers and can as well reduce a teacher's morale to teach in such atmospheres.

KGT4 identified a similar logistical problem that can hinder KG education in the classroom:

Sometimes when you are teaching, you find the table to be too long for the learners" (KGT4).

KGT1 also reminded the education office authorities of the need for maintenance and replenishing of damaged resources when she stated:

But our desks, our chairs are getting weak. Getting weak and broken. So, we will need replacement. If there's any offer or help or support, we'll be so much grateful” (KGT1).

These observations are being made by participants because they identify a direct correlation between the proactive posture of the education office in solving these problems and its positive impact on teaching and learning of kindergarteners.

4.6.4 Teacher agency enhances reading proficiency

In spite of the various challenges that can hamper educational success at the KG level, a teacher who is well trained and equipped with the relevant experience for KG instruction, having service experience and competent in adopting the most efficient approaches in teaching sounds, phonetics and reading, can navigate around all difficulties and end up achieving the goal of developing a reading proficient KG learner.

In spite of all the challenges, few of the teachers still made these observations about their personal efforts and their learners.

I studied early grade in training college (KGT1).

While KGT1 acknowledges the role of her professional training in her teaching responsibility, KGT8 adds her long service experience in the work that has contributed to their success:

I've been teaching in the early grade for almost twelve years now ...I'm currently at this primary in KG department. ... I can confidently say it's worked massively for us to see results. (KGT8).

To KGT10 continuous education development and self-improvement is a critical experience in a teacher's agency to achieve results even in the face of grave challenges:

I've been in the service, the teaching service for 20 years now. Specifically, six

years in early grade ... I've been here for six years and then my highest degree is first degree in basic education. I specialized in social studies. I did general by specializing social studies attend the UEW (KGT10).

Finally, KGT5 adds her personal teaching philosophy of using play-centered approach as part of her agency to inculcate into her learners, reading skills:

My [teaching] philosophy is play. Like play... I just draw a line in the classroom. You shift this table; I'll draw a line. The lines that the children have been doing. So sometimes I write, I am going to school in the boxes. So, I will engage then and the person will jump on. Next person, um, um. Then the next person also jump on. That means they know what they are doing. I've taught them already, so they know it. (KGT5).

KGT5 acknowledges how a play centered teaching philosophy has helped her to get the attention and involvement of all her learners to participate in the learning and improve their reading and writing skills.

4.7. Summary of Findings

The current study was occasioned as a result of unavailable empirical study within Akuapem South Municipality about the role of the KG Teacher in enhancing the reading proficiency of KG learners in the current globalized world order. Upon adopting fourfold research questions of the approaches, KG teachers used, the training teachers undergo to become qualified, the TLRs available of teaching and the challenges confronting teachers, the study found the following:

Firstly, KG teachers predominantly rely on the Jolly Phonics teaching approaches to carry out their teaching roles in their quest to enhance reading proficiency among learners although the logistics to procure it tends to fall upon the teachers' agency. Secondly, some KG teachers reported having the requisite academic training professional experience as well

as the appropriate teaching philosophy to carry out their role although same cannot be said for all the participants. Thirdly, it was conspicuously found that all teachers reported that they had woefully inadequate TLRs to carry out their teaching function. Fourthly, teachers reported grave challenges confronting them in the discharge of their duties to include non-supportive parents who fail to assist their wards with their home works, non-supportive communities who create social tensions within which teachers experience low morale to teach children among others. Finally, it was found that teachers still managed to use the teachers' agency to circumvent all the difficulties to teach KG learners to enhance their reading skills.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussions

This chapter is aimed at discussing the research findings in relations with the literature pertinent in the area of early childhood education and the theories of Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems. Each of the research questions that guided the current study is discussed in the context of the sample, reach setting as well as theory and empirical research in the area. The final discussion topic bothered on how the individual factors and functional roles of the KG teacher is channeled to enhance the KG learners' proficiency in reading. The first of the research question of the study is:

5.2 What are the approaches in teaching that helps enhance proficiency in reading among KG learners?

Findings from this study indicated that the jolly-phonics approaches have become the commonest teaching approach among most KG teachers within Akuapem-South Municipal directorate of education. This was noticed when participants of the studies emphasized their approaches falling under subcategory themes namely (1) teaching by demonstration, (2) using the jolly-phonics program and (3) use of segmentation and syllabus in helping learners to learn letter name and simple words until they achieve reading.

Demonstration: Firstly, the teachers use *demonstration* by explaining a letter, sound or word through relating it to a gesture or the actual thing that it represents. This approach helps learners to better identify and connect the letter, sound or word to actual thing in the world. Demonstration helps concretize an otherwise abstract concept or thing to the KG learner making them to learn it faster. This finding is consistent with Piaget's (2000) observation that although children from 2 to 7 years of age are at preoperational stage are yet to develop logical qualities, they are however ready for multiple language development. They learn alphabets,

sounds and words better when they are encouraged to imitate demonstrations, recitations of them. This finding is also consistent with Chomsky (2011), observing that children must reach a stage where they have developed some biological structures linguistically before they can learn to pronounce and learn language. Studies have supported that not only does the endowment of language acquisition structures affect the acquisition of vocabulary but even technology-enhanced language-learning also positively affect the rate of language learning and reading (Hassan et al., 2017; Marefat & Moradian, 2007).

Segmentation and Reading by Syllabus: Secondly, in *segmentation and reading by syllabus*, KG teachers reported to using an approach that makes learners break a word into the various chunks of syllabus within a particular word. For instance, one participant narrated how she was successful in teaching her early kindergarteners to use segmentation into four syllabuses to learn the word “*he-li-cop-ter* for [helicopter]. Again, this supports Chomsky’s (1957) syntactic structures which highlights the biological development in preoperational children like kindergarteners to be able to combine different sounds to form a word.

Jolly Phonics: Finally, participants reported using Jolly-phonics as an all-encompassing teaching approach that integrates all the teaching approach specifics in the learning of sounds through adding phonemics, demonstration, recitations to actual role play by involving the KG learner in the teaching and learning process. Since the introduction of the Jolly-phonics approach in the municipality, more teachers have come to find out its effectiveness in achieving reading proficiency among learners. Here again, this finding is consistent with child developmental and educational theories that places the KG child (2 to 5years) as a play stage within which stage children learn a lot by exploring and playing in their environment (Erikson, 1982; Piaget, 2000). The second research question and its findings are discussed as follows:

5.3 What instructional skills or knowledge level do KG teachers use in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners in ECEs in Akuapem South Municipality?

A teacher's agency involves the professional training, practical service experience, teaching philosophy and all their knowledge set and instructional skills to be able to organize their classroom to achieve maximum learning among kindergarteners. In the current study, participants reported that their success in achieving reading proficiency among the KG learners was a result of the requisite academic qualification, professional experience and the adoption of an appropriate teaching philosophy.

Some of the critical quotes that the findings from participants captured and interpreted in the results column to proof the agency that KG teachers claimed to possess was portrayed in the following extracts:

By way of a teacher's agency which involves their educational qualification, level of experience and teaching philosophy among others to help them assist their KG learners achieve proficiency KGT10 highlights her qualification and credentials:

"I've been in the service, the teaching service for 20 years now. Specifically, six years in early grade ... I've been here for six years and then my highest degree is first degree in basic education. I specialized in social studies. I did general by specializing social studies attend the UEW" (KGT10, Female, AB Circuit 39 years).

While KGT10 itemizes her long experience and her academic degree in Education, KGT1 emphasizes her specialization at the Teachers' Training College being Early Grade Education:

I studied early grade in training college (KGT1, Female, NB Circuit 36 years).

While KGT1 and KGT10 touts their academic credentials as well as long years of experience in KG teaching, KGT8 focusses on a practical twelve years' experience in handling KG learners which she identifies to have achieved considerable success in spite of the general poor outcomes:

I've been teaching in the early grade for almost twelve years now ...I'm currently at this primary in KG department. ... I can confidently say it's worked massively for us to see results. (KGT8, Female, OB Circuit 32 years).

KGT5 highlights an equally important aspect of a teacher's agency being their teaching philosophy and effective style of getting results even in difficult circumstances:

My [teaching] philosophy is play. Like play. I teach through playing with the kids...(KGT5).

The above critical quotes of four KGTs within the Akuapem South Municipality where the research was conducted highlights the degree to which a teacher can rely on their agency even in situations of unavailable professional continuous development, inadequate TLRs and several challenges to make the best out of constraints in undertaking their role in the classroom setting.

5.3.1 Academic qualification

The current study revealed that one major factor that impacts on the teacher's ability to be successful in assisting the KG learners acquire reading skills is in the academic education and training the teacher underwent. Teachers who did not learn early grade find it difficult to assist KG learners in their quest to develop reading skills. Some of the teachers emphasized that in addition to their general training in child education, they did early grade education to better understand how to teach early grade learners. It is becoming an increasing pursuit for KG teachers to pursue and specialize in early grade education in order to hone their skills in helping the KG learners. As a result, some teachers in ASM education directorate have begun

enrolling in early grade education programs even at the Master's level. This dynamic should improve the skills-set of the teacher whose contribution to the child's microsystem environment from the mesosystem of the school environment can shape the child to develop language and reading skills due to their arrival at the preoperational stage and the development of language acquisition devices (LAD) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Chomsky, 1957; Piaget, 2000).

5.3.2 Professional experience

A second key aspect of a teacher's agency in assisting the KG learner in achieving reading is the experience of the teacher in competent engagement with preoperational learners at the early childhood education stage over the years. In the present study, a considerable number of participants emphasized how the number of years they have spent with KG learners from a minimum of six years to twenty years have hone their skills and increased their competency to use best practice that enhance KG learners reading proficiency. This is consistent with the role of experience in teaching and how effective teachers are in achieving academic results among their learners. In a study by Podolsky et al. (2019), investigating whether teaching experience increases teacher effectiveness, findings that resulted indicated that a teacher's teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout much of the teacher's career. The study findings further indicated that that as teachers gain experience, their students are more likely to do better on measures of success beyond test scores and others (Podolsky et al.).

5.3.3 Teaching philosophy

The present study also revealed how the teaching philosophy of a KG teacher plays a significant role in their teacher agency and what specific approaches they emphasize in order to achieve reading proficiency among KG learners. For many KG teachers in ASM education directorate, using play to teach the KG teacher is most effective since most of KG learners of 2-7 years of age falls within the play stage of development. This sheds light on the advocacy

for commodious environment such playgrounds, serene compounds, demonstrative teaching and learning role play in the classroom that allows learners to be more involved and active throughout the learning process. This finding is consistent with the fact that the teaching philosophy adopted in teaching and training students can have considerable impact on the level of success experienced by both teachers and students alike (Akabayir & Tedikçi, 2022). In the study by Akabayir and Tedikçi, it could be shown that if the teaching philosophy adopted by a teacher is favourable to the subject being taught and the calibre of students constituting the learners, academic results are improved than when the teaching philosophy is out of sync with the subject or the learners. The third research question findings are discussed as follows:

5.4 What are the resources available for use by KG teachers to enhance reading proficiency among kindergarteners?

The current study revealed that whereas some of the resources needed to undertake efficient kindergarten education is provided several others are lacking or woefully inadequate. For instance, although the past phenomenon of school under trees was not found in the municipality, many of the schools lack adequate amenities such as decent toilets, and regular available water. Some ECEs lack appropriate safe and serene environments and playgrounds for the children. In terms of ICT tools and learning materials, many participants complained about its inadequacy. KG teachers therefore reported that they improvised the use of other resources to achieve the education of their learners. This strategy of improvisation made them to make the most of non-commodious school structures and environment, use their own ICT materials to supplement KG learners' education and create their own learning materials in situations when they are not available.

5.4.1 Non-commodious School environment

A considerable number of the infrastructure for early childhood education centres in the municipality require upgrade to modern standards. Apart from ticking the checklist to see

the problems of poor facilities, lack of appropriate playground, unstable water supply and unavailable amenities, some participants corroborated this observation and boldly requested that the authorities step in to remedy the situation. This condition has dire effects on the education process not only for the teachers but for the larger society and the learners in particular. Latest research findings by Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) indicated that considerable number of public schools are deprived lacking the appropriate infrastructure and teaching and learning environment to achieve quality kindergarten education. Also, in connection with this problem, there are sometimes a short fall in the number of teachers and other qualified personnel required to oversee the running of ECEs in the various districts and MMDAs of the country posing a threat to the quality of early grade education (Opong Frimpong & Woode-Eshun, 2023).

5.4.2 Unavailable ICT Tools

Today's education is essentially ICT driven. The presentation of the jolly phonics programs requires the tools of laptops, projectors, mobile phones, bluetooth, pen drives, speakers etc. Unfortunately, these materials are unavailable in majority of the ECEs. Participants reported having to borrow some of these tools from elsewhere or use their own resources to acquire these tools in order to achieve the success of jolly-phonics presentation in their educational teaching approaches. Apart from these tools, there has to be adequate data bundles for internet connectivity to download more relevant phonic programmes to enhance the education of kindergarteners. The report of unavailable ICT resources could be a challenge negatively impacting some teachers' morale to deliver. As recommended by Badu et al. (2023) necessary interventions have to be in place so that foundation of oral language, phonological awareness and print knowledge on the part of the kindergarten learner would be secured and ICT resources should be considered in the attainment of this goal.

5.4.3 Inadequate Learning materials

Apart from the unavailability of ICT tools in the municipality, there was also deficit in the availability of teaching and learning materials that helps teachers to better communicate their instruction to the better appreciation of kindergarteners. Letter cards, photo cards, charts and carton objects are things that many kindergarten teachers had to create their own one and search for others to make their teaching of the learners more viable. Participants reported that there was almost no provision of these stuffs from the education directorate. This is consistent with findings by Gustafsson, (2003) that the level of teaching resources available for education has relationship with educational results. Inadequate resources leads to poor educational results while adequate provision of resources improves educational experience and results.

5.4.4 Inadequate Social and School Amenities

The present study revealed that more upgrade of infrastructure and amenities need to be made accessible to the increasing number of kindergarteners who patronize early childhood education as government keeps taking the earlier long-term policy of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE). This policy drive as well as population growth is making the available resources to children being born in the towns and villages of the municipality untenable. The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have projected the standard of education and facilities needed for the teeming children that requires education at the early grade level. In their latest report on quality of life and well-being needed through the provisions of amenities for school and healthy experience, UNESCO still identifies multiple deprivations at the individual levels in health, education and general standard of living making the attainment of quality kindergarten education for instance still a challenge in several developing countries (Sung, 2024). The fourth research question is discussed as follows:

5.5 What are the challenges faced by teachers in their quest to enhance teaching proficiency among KG learners?

In the current study, a couple of challenges were reported to be an impediment to the dream of enhancing KG learners reading proficiency. These challenges have multiple sources. Some of them came from the individual learner and their parents' non-supportiveness. Others resulted from non-supportive communities that tends to reduce teacher morale. The education directorate was also found to be palpable in being an impediment to early grade education. However, the individual's teacher agency was still found to help a teacher to surmount both personal and all the collective challenges to do their best in improving early grade education within the municipality.

5.5.1 Non-supportive Parents

The finding of non-supportive parents in this study occurred in two principal forms. Firstly, participants reported that some parents did not get involved in their children's education by way of not supporting their academic work at home. Parents who failed to get involved in this manner did not assist their wards at home when they brought reading assignment and other home works that required the help of parents and guardians. Kindergarten teachers reported how frustrating this phenomenon was since it hampers their progress to build on previous learning whiles parents stood aloof and unconcerned about the education of their own kids.

The second way in which kindergarten teachers reported parental negligence was in situations where parents left their parental responsibility of caregiving and providing the basic necessities of their children for school. KG teachers reported situations in which parents would not pay for books that are sold at the school claiming the government says it is free education. Another form of negligence is failure to give adequate food to the kids for the long hours they spent at school claiming the government has brought free feeding. These attitudes by some parents affect not only the concentration of the children who tend to run home for food and by

the time they return, that lesson is over or they even fail to return at all. This situation as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is a microsystems environmental problem that shapes the child in undesirable way in terms of their attitude towards education. “If my parents do not support me with my homework, then why is education important?” reflected by a kindergartener. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further argued that the relationship between parents and their early grade kids are reciprocal in nature and as a result failure to give support to the kids make the kids to respond in kind not placing value on things parents direct them to do like going to school. Some of these problems is clearly a result of attitude of parents that can have dire conditions on their wards education. This is consistent with findings by Gallindo and Sheldon (2012) who found that a healthy and harmonious connections between school and home constituting the mesosystem ecological environment leads to kindergarten achievement gains. When school and home connections are lacking implying the mediating role of family involvement being unavailable, there are poorer kindergarten academic results.

5.5.2 Non-supportive Communities

In some cases, the challenges teachers faced in teaching kindergarteners went beyond their immediate family to the larger community of school and the nature of the neighbourhood. KG Teachers complained of situations in which the attitude of the community makes them to place more emphasis on funerals and festivals that are happening by travelling with the kids during instructional terms for weeks and over. Other parents may send their young kids with them for markets claiming there is no one to take care of them as they travel for days. And by the time they return from such trips and events, the child has lost their memory of all the gains of language and reading progress made. Also, one of the observations made about one of the schools in the municipality where drug addicts tend to hang out, theft of the school property like books and other stationary was reported apart from the illicit refuse dumping and defecation around the school premises by these addicts. A teacher reported how the school

management committee and PTA got involved with the help of the chiefs and elders to halt the phenomenon. Failure to get a community's support to overcome exosystem challenges in a society can cause poor morale for teachers who stand at the cutting edge of educational campaign of early grade learners. These findings shed light on the relationship between neighbourhood environment and the performance of early graders in their education experience (Lapointe et al., 2007).

5.5.3 Inadequate Support from Education Directorate

Teachers also reported a certain level of negligence from the education directorate in the municipality when they lay the responsibility of the provision of certain teaching and learning resources right at their doorstep. Although in today's education, PTA and school management committees comprising of community leaders all play significant roles, certain responsibilities like curriculum development, posting of more newly trained teacher personnel to the municipality as well some fundamental teaching and learning resources such as buildings furnished with tables and desks as well as ICT resources should be owned by the directorate. Unfortunately, the failure of the directorate in the provision of these logistics tend to retard the educational campaign of kindergarteners since only what teachers manage to improvise is what the learners get. Here again, the lack of support from education directorates reduces teacher's morale in giving their best towards early grade education.

5.5.4 Individual Teacher Challenges

The study also found that until recently, teachers who may be saddled with numerous personal and collective challenges were ignored by the educational system as well as the exosystem environments within which they work. Some of these teachers do not come from the immediate communities with which they teach. They have been posted into such distant communities and villages where they take vehicles and walk footpaths before they arrive at their school. Unfortunately, until recently that the Ghana National Association of Teachers

(GNAT) and other coalition of concerned teachers threatened a long strike government were not considering transport allowance for teachers who accept posting into rural communities. Also, in the ASM directorate, not until recently that a durbar of stakeholders was called there was no attempt to honour and appreciate high performing teachers in the directorate. The argument is that an award scheme, exists but the process seems to many teachers as biased since none of those who win it comes from the typical rural ASM directorate of education. However, the last scheme that was well publicized is hope to be a step in the right direction and should be encouraged, sustained and improved upon so hardworking teachers who play their roles in early grade education will feel recognized and appreciated. Research found that recognition of hardworking staffs boosts morale and increases productivity not only in education but in all spheres of life and work (Encarnacion et al., 2023). After discussing all the research questions, it was also found that there is an apparent relationship or association between the teacher role factors and their ability to achieve proficiency in reading among the KG learners. This association is further discussed as follows:

5.6 Discussing the Association between RQ1-4 ON Proficiency in Reading

The final research question was to explore to what extent the factors that affect the role of teachers in their quest to educate kindergarteners can shape or influence their reading proficiency. Under theme 1, I discuss how non-supportive parental attitudes affect reading proficiency among KG learners. In theme 2, how do unsupportive communities affect reading proficiency. Further, how does the third theme of inadequate support from the educational directorate affect reading proficiency of the KG learner. Finally, in what way can teacher agency navigate the challenges and still achieve reading proficiency until all the lapses are resolved by a collective stakeholder harnessed approach.

5.6.1 Non-supportive Parents retards Reading Proficiency

In more specific way, a child's immediate microenvironment is the home comprising the child's own thoughts, feelings and behaviours about life and early grade school. The motivation for learning to read and write can be developed and reinforced in this immediate family surroundings of microsystem interchange between parents, siblings and kindergartener's self (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). If parents and other immediate family actors fail to play their role in assisting early graders with their homeworks or providing for the basic needs to school, the goals of achieving reading and writing will not be successful not to talk about reading proficiency.

In this regard non-supportive microsystem's environment was a fundamental bottleneck in the quest to achieve reading proficiency since parents failed to played their contributive role in adding to the KG teacher's effort at school. As advocated in the study of Deyell-Gingold, (2006) that National PTAs in other jurisdictions like the United States of America, parental and family involvement in the child's school experience increases student achievement and success.

The complex environments within which an early grader can develop and improve their language and reading skills do not lie only with the immediate family of parents and siblings alone but it moves on to the mesosystem environmental factors such as teachers' agency, and educators in addition to the child's own readiness for formal instruction in a classroom setting. This was found by Fedina et al., (2017) who stated that educators and parental readiness seem to be even more critical in implementing learning interventions in KG education in parts of Europe. Due to the criticality of the roles of both teachers and parents and other family members in the education of early graders, these stakeholders themselves need support in situations when they are lacking in some ways. For instance, a parent who is uneducated or illiterate may have to be educated informally on the importance of their support in their child's

early grade education so they can contribute their quota to its full realization. Similarly, teachers who need progressive refresher cause t adopt best practices in the circumstances should be aided to get it so as to achieve early grade reading proficiency at all costs. This observation is consistent with the findings of Majzub & Rashid (2012) that the child's readiness for formal instruction in reading and writing proficiency is so critical that disadvantaged parents should be supported to become knowledgeable of their roles in parenting to enhance the supportive microsystem environment in order to achieve this educational goal.

5.6.2 Non-supportive Communities reduce Teacher Morale

Additionally, the larger community of parents and siblings, teachers and the neighbourhood within which kindergarteners are educated play significant role in their reading and writing proficiency. Earlier research has pointed to the important role of social skills acquisition and adjustment within the larger environment of school, home, peers and friends in the neighbourhood by the ready kindergartener as a critical factor for child's play behaviour and communication skills in their development (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990). Just as Chomsky (1959) alerts of the LAD for language development, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) emphasis on the role of the mesosystems and exo-system environments are important contributors to the realization of what is biological disposition in the early-grader.

Unfortunately, due to the lacking involvement of some of the immediate communities within which some KG learners were schooling, all the work load was left on the teachers and this became a disincentive to the teachers whose morale were reduced. In the current study therefore non-supportive community participation in early grade led to reduced teacher morale which threatens the attainment of reading proficiency.

5.6.3 Inadequate Support of Education Directorate

The education directorate that oversees the running of ECEs in a municipality serves as the representative of central government authority in ensuring that the logistical support for the

successful running of schools within the municipality. Many of the community factors that impedes smooth running of early grade education can be better intervened and managed by a responsible education directorate. The educational directorate since represents the national government serves as the exosystem environment that surrounds the mesosystem and the microsystems. Studies have found that most of the challenges saddling communities and neighbourhoods will be best intervened in when governments get involves. In the current study the report of some teachers that the education directorates do not support them adequately explains why some impediments to kindergarten education continues to be perennial.

Through the directorate under the Ghana Education service, appropriate legislations can discourage conditions that impede on the education of early graders, as well as mandate the building of early grade infrastructures that are up to international standards equipped the necessary ICT resources, playgrounds and all relevant amenities conducive for early grade education. This education directorate role is consistent with Megresa et a., (2019) who recommended that exosystem environments like the government and the community create create more awareness, reorient community members about the scope, objectives and programme of education in order to get their full support.

5.6.4 Teacher Agency Enhances Reading

In spite of the numerous obstacles impeding on the smooth running of kindergarten education, the teacher is considered the key handler who is in direct touch with the children and can play extremely significant role in achieving educational objectives at the early grade level. This is why studies continue to emphasize on the agency on teachers and the need to equip them with all the necessary training and resources to get their optimum contribution. The need for continuous improvement to enhance a teacher's agency is emphasized by Frimpong and Woode-Eshun (2023) recommended that there must be a continuous development of teachers at the KG level in particular to enhance their skills to educate KG learners to be

become proficient in reading and writing. Also, in line with this government involvement at the exosystems environment, Badu et al., (2022) recommended that there must be some motivational packages in the form of funding for quality teacher training and continuous development so as to update the skills set of teachers to fulfill the responsibility of training kindergarteners in reading and writing proficiently.

In the current study, although teachers were saddled with numerous challenges ranging for the child's own readiness and preparedness for early grade education at the microlevel, through to the mesosystems of home and school and the exo-systems of home, school, community and the national society, teachers still used their agency involving their qualification, experience and teaching philosophy to achieve reading proficiency among KG learners. This was made possible through their ability to improvise and create innovative ways of achieving educational targets although resources are inadequate on the ground.

5.7 Summary

The current study explored the role of the Kindergarten Teacher enhancing KG learners' proficiency in reading within the Akuapem South Municipality. The study became warranted when in the midst of the contemporary dynamic early grade education in the world over coupled with poor reading habits among basic school learners in ASM, a quest was born to diagnose the problem and fill the research gap within the ASM. A purposive sampling was adopted to study KG Teachers within the ASM where participants were purposively sampled within the circuits and conveniently treated to a semi-structured interview schedule about their role as KG teachers in facilitating reading proficiency among their learners. Interviews were recorded and transcribed as well as checklist was observed among the teachers in their classroom teaching and the school environment within which KG learners were being raised. Research questions which involved the exact pedagogical approaches used by teachers, the instructional and training skills-set of teachers, the TLRs available to teachers for teaching as

well as the challenges confronting teachers in discharging their duties were explored. Findings from the study revealed that jolly phonics was the predominant approach adopted for use in the classroom with some teachers reporting adequate academic and professional competence though not same for all. Other findings revealed that TLRs provided for the teachers were woefully inadequate while teachers themselves complained about challenges with parents, school communities and even the local government in the carrying out of their duties. However, teachers reported that they manage to improvise to fulfill their professional duty through their teacher agency to impart reading proficiency among their learners.

5.8 Limitations of the Study

The study's scope was the Akuapem South municipality. Although findings may be theoretically transferrable to other districts and municipalities one must be cautious in doing that since qualitative approaches of this study does not allow for generalization of results to external populations.

Also, criticism may be raised about the sampling approaches. The sampling approach of purposive was appropriate to study the population since it serves the exact purpose of finding the peculiar problems with that particular population. Purposive was used to recruit KG teachers who were distant apart within the ASM education directorate and convenience method used in interviewing participants in the five educational circuits within the ASM. Incidentally Aburi circuit had four participants in the process. To minimize biases in sampling and data collection procedures, I shared my interviews with other faculty members and more importantly, my supervisor for feedback and possible inputs. These measures helped overcome the possible limitations that could confound the study.

5.9 Recommendations for Stakeholder Institutions

Due to the findings of this study, the various stakeholders within the complex environment involved in child education must play their roles to realize educational goals. Specifically,

1. Parents and family must realize that they are the fundamental base for early graders to develop language, sounds, phonemics and reading. Parents and siblings must therefore develop and reinforce the children's drive to read and write through a reciprocal relationship of supporting their wards homework assignment to boost the morale of early graders to love learning.
2. The community in the form of schools, churches, mosques and traditional authorities must help create enabling environment that will cause early grade education to thrive. This can be done by creating recreation facilities, playgrounds and other amenities that boost early grade education.
3. The education directorate under the auspices of the GES and the government of Ghana must budget adequate resources to meet all the needs of education especially in educational infrastructure, training of competent early grade personnel teachers and provision of all necessary ICT and teaching and learning materials for maximum educational experience.
4. Finally, teachers must be incentivized enough through training them and encouraging them to use their agency to work hard and turn the educational fortunes of coming generations.

5.10 Suggestions for Future Research

Studies of this nature should be carried in the various districts, municipalities and metropolises to find where conditions vary and where they are similar. Future studies can adopt quantitative technique to test particular hypothesis of the impact of using a teacher's agency on improving reading proficiency among KG learners.

5.11 Contribution of the Study

The current study has served as an impact assessment of the role of KG teachers on KG education within the Akuapem South municipality of the Eastern region of Ghana. In this study,

KG education seemed to be saddled with numerous constraints right from the homes of the learners, their neighborhoods, the community and the larger geopolitical environment that is under the immediate oversight of education directorates on behalf of GES and the central government.

A major highlight of the study is how a teacher's agency in terms of their competent training qualifications, service experience and teaching philosophy and organizational skills can be harnessed to achieve educational goals even during logistical constraints.

5.12 Conclusion

The role of the KG Teacher in enhancing reading proficiency among KG learners in Akuapem South municipality was explored in the current study. Using purposive and convenient sampling techniques 12 participants were recruited and treated to semi-structured interview scheduled about the roles in the classroom within the context of the approaches they used in teaching, their professional training and experience, the available TLRs and the challenges that confront their duty in the classroom. Also, an additional checklist on teachers' professional classroom organization as well as a checklist on the school environment was observed to corroborate interview reports. After twelve participants interview reports were audio recorded and transcribed, saturation of data was observed. Using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis, four themes were found. These are: Most teachers adopted jolly phonics approaches in the classroom. Secondly, more teachers reported professional competence though not same for all. Other findings revealed that TLRs provided for the teachers were woefully inadequate while teachers themselves complained about challenges with parents, school communities and even the local government in the carrying out of their duties. However, teachers reported that they manage to improvise with what they had to achieve their goal of enhancing reading skills among learners. This findings are discussed with literature and has implications for education directorates and the government for that matter,

school management committees, parents and teacher themselves in the quest to develop KG education in the country.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ROLE OF TEACHERS IN KG EDUCATION

Semi-structured Interview Guide Instrument and Checklist



UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION WINNEBA

(All rights reserved)

Dear **Prospective Participant**, my name is **Fredlina Mensah-Sarbah**, a final year MPhil Student of the Department of Early Grade Education of the Faculty of Educational Studies in the University of Education, Winneba.

I am conducting a study titled Kindergarten Learners' Proficiency in Reading: The Role of the Teacher in Akuapem South Municipality. As important stakeholders in the education of early grade children, your candid views are of great value to the study and they are being solicited for the purpose.

This part of the study is to interview you as a teacher/ parent/ guardian or significant family member and stakeholder of their education and to be permitted where necessary to require assessments scores from your ward at school.

The purpose of the study and the data collection is purely academic and information gathered would be held in confidence by analysing for further research to improve on quality early childhood education delivery. You are however free to choose to participate or opt out at your

discretion. There are no right or wrong answers to the open-ended questions asked in the interview guide. Only your candid views are being solicited for the purpose. The interview which may last for a time ranging from thirty minutes to sixty minutes and audio recorded.

Thanks for your participation

DATE Interviewed: _____

RESIDENCE: _____

INTERVIEWER: Fredlina Mensah – Sarbah

Participant's Consent: YES _____ NO _____ Participant Signature _____

A. GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age _____ School _____ Circuit: _____ Educational Level _____

Years of Service _____

Level of Home Support Given to Child: _____

Official/ Individual Brief Biodata _____

B. APPROACHES IN TEACHING

1. What are the specific teaching approaches adopted to instruct the KG learners and enhance their reading proficiency? (**Probe** into how each of the approaches are used and to what extent they are used)
 - vii. Demonstration: what can you say about your use of demonstration to teach the learners?
 - viii. Sounds: How do you use sounds to teach learners?

- ix. Role Play: At what stage do you adopt role play in your teaching and what has been the effect
- x. Recitation: what can you say about your use of recitation?
- xi. Phonemics: How do you use phonemics?
- xii. Segmentation: Can you illustrate your use of segmentation in your teaching?
- xiii. Syllabus: How does your use of syllabus help in learner ability to learn pronunciation and eventual reading

C. INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- 2. What instructional skills or knowledge do you possess as a teacher to enhance reading proficiency among KG learners in Akuapem South Municipality? (*Probe into each skill and how it is deployed in teaching*)
 - i. How do you organize your learners in the classroom to enhance the ability to learn well?
 - ii. What is your knowledge of the sounds and how do you use it to support learners to read?
 - iii. What is your personal philosophy of reading?
 - iv. What is your current highest academic level of education that you have attained as a teacher?
 - v. What practical training, workshops and in-service trainings you have undergone?

D. TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

3. What is the requisite teaching and learning resources (TLRs) available to you as a teacher to aid you in teaching KG learners in Akuapem South Municipality? (***Probe into all the available resources actually made available to the teacher in question***)
 - i. What teaching and learning materials in prints such as letter cards, alphabet freezer, pictures, story books do you have in your class?
 - ii. How do you administer assessments to your learners: Prompt (How do you assists special needs learners in the class?)
 - iii. Which ICT materials such as Laptops, sounds systems, presenting jolly phonics etc. are available in your school?
 - iv. How would you describe your classroom environment?
 - v. Can you describe the condition of the premises around the classroom?
 - vi. What available amenities, such as toilets, clean water, safe playgrounds etc. do you have in your school?

E. CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS WITH REGARD TO THEIR TEACHING RESPONSIBILITY

4. What peculiar challenges in your view is confronting the KG teachers like yourself in this school and how do you think they can be resolved?
 - i. Do you have the full support from the other stakeholders of education particularly the learner's parents and family in the discharge of your role as a teacher? Explain
 - ii. ***Prompts*** (Role of education directorate and GES, Local and central government responsibilities
 - iii. Generate lists of key stakeholders and probe (Traditional leaders in the community, Nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic institutions etc.)

F. OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST OF THE ENVIRONMENTS AND CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED TO TEACHER'S ROLE: Tick where appropriate (ü)

#	Checklist Item	Suitable	Not Suitable
1.	The adequacy and condition of the ECE centre		
2.	The desks and classrooms condition		
3.	Availability of ICT resources		
4.	Availability of amenities and utilities in the premises such as portable water, place of convenience etc.		
5.	Availability of playgrounds to be utilized by play stage kids		
6.	Availability of other recreational facility		
7.	The safety of the compound and premises for ECE (from bushes infested with dangerous reptiles for example)		
8.	Safe and hygienic place for eating		
9.	Availability of nearby health centre or first aid for prompt medical attention in case of health hazard		

G. INSTRUCTIONAL CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVATION OF TEACHERS (ü)

#	Instructional Checklist Item	Poor	Fair	Good
1.	How the KGT organize her learners in the classroom to enhance their ability to learn well			
2.	The KGT's knowledge of the sounds and how they assist learners to read			

3.	The KGT's personal philosophy of reading			
4.	The KGT's current highest academic level of education			
5.	The KGT's practical training, workshops and in-service trainings attended			



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

P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana

APPENDIX 2:

INTRODUCTORY LETTER REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

Section A

Name of ent: FREDLINA MENSAH - SARBAN

Student: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION M'PHILL

Programme: 8031900003

Index Number:

Contact No: 0507024400 Year of Entry (Admission)

Thesis Topic: "THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN ENHANCING KG LEARNERS' PROFICIENCY IN READING IN AKWAPIM SOUTH MUNICIPALITY"

GES Address of Research Area: AKWAPIM - SOUTH MUNICIPALITY
P. O. BOX 192, AKWAPIM SOUTH - ABURI
GPS: E-3-000-3786

Signature: [Signature] Date: 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2024

60

2003

(PLEASE ATTACH YOUR INSTRUMENTS)

Section B

Name of Supervisor:

MRS. JUSTINA ADU

Contact No •

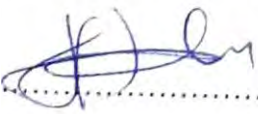
0244188163

Confirmation of;

1. **Readiness of Chapter 1-3:** The candidate has finish chapter 1 to 3 is ready to go to the field to collect data.

2. Inspection and Validation of data collection instruments:

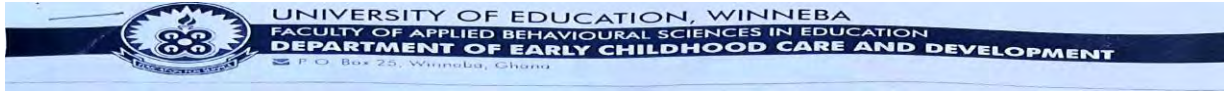
The instrument has been tested

Signature: 

Date: 03-09-24

APPENDIX 3:

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO AKUAPEM SOUTH MUNICIPAL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION**



FARCE/DECE/11

3RD SEPTEMBER, 2024

The Director

Akuapem-South-Aburi

P.O. Box 192

Akuapem

Dear Sir/ Madam,

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I kindly write to introduce to you Ms. Fredlina Mensah - Sarbah with index number:8231900003 who is an M.PHIL. student at the Department of Early Childhood Care and Development, University of Education, Winneba. She is in her final year and has to embark on her thesis on the topic: "The Role of the Teacher in Enhancing KG Learners' Proficiency in Reading in Akuapem South Municipality".

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

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Subbey".

PROF. MICHAEL SUBBEY, (PhD.)

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT