UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

USING PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR EARLY LEARNERS OF ABLEKUMA-SOUTH METROPOLITAN OF THE GREATER ACCRA REGION

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Fosu Gordon Gyeabour, hereby declare that this thesis with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted, either in parts or in whole for another degree elsewhere.

Signature: ……..……

Date: ……..……

Supervisor's Declaration

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

Name of Supervisor: Winston Kwame Abroampa, Ph.D.

Signature: ……..……

Date: ……..……

DEDICATION

To my lovely wife and duagther

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My first and foremost gratitude goes to God Almighty for the life and strength given me to pursue this programme.

My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Winston Kwame Abroampa, without whose effort and help this project work would not have been a success.

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ACRONYMS

AASP	Activity Apperception Story Procedure
CAP	Contextual Apperception Procedure
CEECCIS	Central and Eastern European Countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Activities
DEE	Department for Education and Employment,
DES	Department for Education and Skills
EPPE	The Effective Provision of Preschool Experiences
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
MEYE	Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment
MoE, SS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCCA	National Counsel for Curriculum and Assessment
NRCIM	National Research Council and Institute of Medicine
RAAP	Revised Activity Apperception Procedure
REPEY	Researching Effective Pedagogy in Early Years
UK	United Kingdom
UKNT	United Kingdom National Trust
UNCRC	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	The United Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

The study examined the play activities of early learners in public schools‟ kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region.Cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Using the census sampling procedure, 164 kindergarten teachers were sampled for the study. Questionnaire was used to gather the requisite data for the study. The data were analysed through the computation of descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, independent samples t-test, and ANOVA, using the SPSS. The study found out that, through play activities, teachers identify how children may be assisted in learning through curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning. Also, teachers considered play as an educational tool for teaching and learning and utilise it to promote the development of motor and cognitive skills, social and emotional competencies that assist children to think logically and acquire language skills. The study revealed among others that children display more evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working under supervision. Teachers are considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play and they encourage children to plan their own activities for some of the time and they make considerable social gains. They assist them to use a combination of teacher-led and child-led activities to improve play. The study recommended that, the Ablekuma South-Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and schools organise regular workshop activities centred on the significant role of the teacher in children‟s play activities to improve on their role as teachers and facilities of play activities in the classroom.The Ablekuma South Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and the sampled school, with the support of the Parent Teacher Association should provide the basic teaching and learning materials required for children to engage in a meaningful and intellectual playf activity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Early childhood is a crucial phase in the life of individuals because of the short-term and long-term implications which learning experiences have for every child. Thus, the concept of education and care should take into consideration developmentally appropriate activities (DAP) in order to enhance children`s learning potential. Early childhood education and care should certainly offer children opportunities to be given a good start in life. Developmentally appropriate activities in early childhood education rely on a play-based curriculum, meaningful adult-child interactions, healthy relations between the home and programme (NAEYC, 1996). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicated that the views of children are not conceived as objects to be formed, but as human subjects with their own intentions, interests, relational needs, and capacities (UNCRC, 1989). Article 31 of the UN Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) advocates in favour of children‟s right to engage in play and recreational activities. Early childhood experiences ought to contribute towards children‟s holistic development and give children a good start in life, with opportunities to play (Van-Oers, 2013).

Play is a universal activity shared by humans and animals and is often seen as a necessary and vital aspect of life (Burghardt, 2005). Its centrality to existence was summarised by the philosopher, Huizinga (1947), who described man as homo ludens „playing man‟ rather than homo sapiens „wise man‟, arguing that this best describes the nature of man. In more recent times it has been argued that it is through play that human beings make sense of, and operate in, the world (Strandell, 2000). Consequently, play has been studied and written about by scholars from different

theoretical disciplines and is highly valued by children and by many adults who work with them.

Several researchers and theorists define play differently, however, it is clear that many distinct perspective views on what play is overlapped with other people"s views. Play can be viewed, conceptualised, and defined from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives. Play is defined as an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed, and episodic (Nowak, Nichols& Coutts, 2009). Play as pleasurable and an activity is seen as a situation by which children learn and interact with the environment and the world around them. In this regard since there is no clear and agreed definition, (Gordon, 2009) argued that "play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected and making transformation possible."(p. 8). Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences. The voluntary movement of children which includes exploration, playing and learning according to their interests, offer them the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and level of maturation. Additionally, Wood (2009) argued that, "defining characteristics of play include intrinsic motivation, engagement; dependence on internal rather than external rules, control and autonomy, and attention to means rather than ends" (p. 167).

Play provides children with the opportunity to discover the world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Play and recreational activities make children stronger and help them to develop self-confidence, learn, solve problems, take the initiative and think critically. Through play children make friends, develop social skills and express their feelings and thoughts. Play has the potential to support

children socially, emotionally, linguistically, cognitively/intellectually and in their general well-being as long as children are invited to participate through effective pedagogies (Bennet, 2006). Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences.

Research has shown that play provides great opportunities and promotes active agency, participation and self-expression among children (Smith 2007; Alderson, 2008). Play has a leading role not only in kindergarten but as a fundamental lifestyle and way of learning for the children. Play improves children‟s imagination and helps them to see other people‟s perspectives. Pre-school settings which offer quality experiences are ones which encourage children‟s interactions, communications and participation in the teaching and learning process (Dahlberg & Pence, 1999; NAEYC, 2002). According to Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, and Bell (2010) practitioners or teachers should utilize play pedagogy as a basis for instruction, thus providing quality teaching and learning.

Without play, teaching and learning is impossible (Nachmanovitch, 1990). Children should be able to express themselves in whatever means appropriate to them. In the field of early childhood education, children‟s play should be considered as an integral element in the teaching and learning process that can be seen as part of an education process which promotes democracy in all pre-school settings (Wagner &Einarsdottir, 2006). The use of playful materials in pre-school helps children to experience the real world (Athey, 1984). During play, intense positive emotions, actions, and sensory experiences go hand in hand. Play experiences have a major impact on learning. However, play curricula in which play is used as an educational tool can have drawbacks. According to Sutton-Smith (1997), the belief in play as an educational

tool has become so dominant that we tend to forget the playing child. Children‟s ideas of play generally center “on having fun, being outdoors, being with friends, choosing freely” (p. 49). But teachers tend to behave too “teacherly” and misuse children‟s play to attain their own educational goals, thus spoiling children‟s fun (Pramling &Carlsson, 2008). It is important to rethink the importance of play from the perspective of children and the perspective of teachers. The researcher argues that play and playfulness are a resource of shared pleasure and creativity for teachers and young children. The playfulness of teachers helps to prevent young children from becoming overburdened with strict rules and group discipline.

Teachers should ensure that the vast array of young children‟s confrontations with such constraints as rules, limits, experiences of failure while learning new skills, and caretaking activities are handled in a playful spirit. Play helps young children to overcome the troubles of ordinary life and to share meaningful experiences with caregivers, teachers, parents, and peers. As Trevarthen (2011) wrote: “As they play and make sense together, a baby and parent learn to act their part in a set of performances and mannerisms that grow as the beginnings of a cultural way of life or „habitus‟ (p. 180). Teachers and young children who co-construct a play-reality are building a strong sense of togetherness through rituals that start the day, rituals that celebrate birthdays, or rituals that are incidentally developed by the children. Through rituals share as through drama, storytelling, and pretend play, pedagogues and children create a magic circle. Huizinga (1955) reminded us of the essential value of play: children and animals “play because they enjoy playing, and therein precisely lies their freedom” (p. 8). What counts is the spirit of playfulness that permeates all aspects of young children‟s lives. Play is fundamental to living and adapting to the demands of ordinary life.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Informal observations of the researcher in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra Region revealed a worrying situation. It was observed that, teachers placed prominence on teaching and learning in a formal manner to the neglect of the importance of play. These strategies used by teachers were further enforced by parents because they expect outcomes such as home works, work sheets, and demonstrations of their children‟s ability to read and write from a young age. Speaking to one of the kindergarten teachers privately, she indicated that, the use of play consumed a lot of time, was too laborious, and required the use of a lot of playful materials which were not available for use. It is, therefore, pertinent to find out the play activities of early learners in public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

In the field of early childhood education, children‟s play should be considered as an integral element in the teaching and learning process that can be seen as part of an education process which promotes democracy in all pre-school settings (Bickart, Berke, Burts&Heroman, 2010). The role of the teacher in playful activities for early learners is very paramount. Dunn (1993) identified four key roles of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities which include: facilitator, play partner, listener/ decoder, as well as planner. In playing the role of a facilitator, teachers help children to sustain their play by providing strategies and ideas, extends their thinking, gives children time to think and to speak, supports recall and creates opportunities for children to make the next steps. Teachers play the role as a play partner by just being involved in the child‟s activity, joining in, enjoying it and following the actions developed by the child. As a listener/decoder, teacher listens very carefully, gives full attention to a child and gives the child time to fully explain or to show what they have

been doing. Finally, as planners, teachers can plan to interact with particular children and to build up an interest or strength they have shown, or as part of their observation and assessment (Dunn, 1993).

However, a number of challenges confronting early childhood teachers tend to affect the strategies and perceptions of kindergarten teachers concerning the use of play activities among early learners. Many Early Childhood Education teachers are feeling the pressure to teach essential literacy and numeracy skills rather than using instructional time to play. Kindergarten classrooms are beginning to resemble first-grade classrooms with their emphasis on formal reading and mathematics instruction rather than a focus on the development of social skills and play (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). If we go back one decade, only 15 percent of kindergartners were reading; if we go back thirty years, there were only 5 percent of kindergartners reading, and now nearly 90 percent of kindergartners are reading at the end of kindergarten (Currwood, 2007). The latest research indicates that on a typical day in an all-day kindergarten child spend four to six times more time in literacy and numeracy instruction and preparing for tests than in free time or 'choice time' (Miller & Almon, 2009).

High-stakes testing and test preparation are the driving force behind moving play out of early childhood education. Today, in Ghana, to succeed one must be well-trained in academics and ready to join the work force. However, Pink (2006), stated,

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

Society wants children to perform well on academics and standardized tests. The belief that didactic, teacher-centered instruction and worksheets are effective strategies to promote successful performance on standardized tests has resulted in the exodus of play from not only the classroom but from the school entirely (Miller & Almon, 2009). Yet, this neglects the development of the right side of the brain, which is important for performing tasks that require creativity, empathy and behavioral flexibility. Ghana is now a nation that is driven by assessments, not creativity and this has affected early childhood educators‟ view on using play as a teaching method. However, studies on play activities of early learners in public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro are scanty as few or no study seemed to have been conducted in the Metro. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the use of play activities of early learners in public kindergartens schools of the Ablekuma South Metro of the Region.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To ascertain the perception of kindergarten teachers of playful activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra region.
2. To find out the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region.
3. To identify strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region.
4. To identify the challenges encountered in the use of play activities in public kindergartens in Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region.

1.5 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do kindergarten teachers perceive playful activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb in the Greater Accra Region?
2. What is the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region?
3. What strategies are used by kindergarten teachers to improve play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region?
4. What challenges are encountered in the use of play activities in public kindergartens in Ablekuma South Metro suburb of the Greater Accra Region?

1.6 Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses:

1. **H_O:** There is no statistically significant difference in strategies used by female and male kindergarten teachers.

   H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in strategies used by female and male kindergarten teachers.

2. **H_O:** There is no statistically significant difference in challenges faced in using play by male and female kindergarten teachers.

   H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in challenges faced in using play by male and female kindergarten teachers

3. **H_O:** There is no statistically significant difference in strategies used by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experience.

   H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in strategies used by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experience.

4. **H_O**: There is no statistically significant difference in the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experiences.

   H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experiences.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Early childhood educators and practitioners know how important play is in children‟s lives. Play is not only an enjoyable and spontaneous activity of young children but it also contributes significantly to children‟s psychological development. The findings from this research study would contribute to an understanding of whether children‟s class teachers are aware of the importance and benefits of play-based learning and to what extent this approach is utilized in classrooms. A second contribution would be

that, since it is perceived that Ghanaian kindergarten school teachers in children‟s classes are faced with dilemmas with regards to the use of play-based learning approaches, the study would therefore shed light on those possible challenges.

A further contribution would be able to bring out the views and opinions of teachers on how best this approach can be enhanced or supported in children‟s classes. Therefore, the research findings to be obtained from this study would be of major significance to a number of stake-holders in the early childhood education system. It would contribute to existing literature on the significance of play in early childhood development. It would also serve as empirical data for future researchers and decision makers in the area of early childhood field of study.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the play activities of early learners in public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. The study explored kindergarten teachers‟ perceptions, the strategies they use and the challenges encountered in engaging children in playful activities in kindergarten. The study was theoretically delimited to kindergarten teachers conceptualization of play activities, the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting and guiding play activities, strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play, and challenges encountered in the use of play. The study employed the cross-sectional survey design. Kindergarten teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region were the only teachers involved in the study.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

It was realised that some teachers failed to respond to some of the items on the questionnaire. This might negatively affect the findings of this study. Also, schools used in this study were selected from a list of public schools in Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. This selective sampling may decrease the generalisation of the findings. Therefore, findings of this study could not be generalised to the public kindergarten schools that were not in Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

1.10 Operational Definition of Terms

Early Childhood Education: They are services for children under four years and involve elements of both physical care and education. Services provided incorporate day care, pre-school, home visits by trained professionals, health and nutrition services, and parental education.

Kindergarten: A programme or class for four to six-year-old children that serves as an introduction to formal education.

Play Activities: These are planned activities that are developmentally appropriate to assist children learn through fun.

1.11 Organisation of the Study

The study was organized into five (5) chapters. The first chapter dealt with the introduction which gives an insight into the background to the study, the purpose of the study and the research questions which serves as a guide to the study. It also dealt with the significance of the study and the delimitation. The definition of terms as used in the study and the organization of the study concludes the chapter. Chapter Two focused on the review of related literature on the topic. It comprises the theoretical

framework, the conceptual framework, and the empirical framework. Chapter Three comprised of the methodology. It highlighted the population, sample and sampling techniques used in the study. It again described the research design as well as the instruments and methods used for the study. The analysis of the data collected for the study opens Chapter Four. It also contains the analysis of the data in relation to the research questions. Chapter Five, dealt with the summary, conclusion, recommendations, and suggestions made on the topic for future research.

1.12 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter dealt with the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, the definition of terms, and the organisation of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This chapter focused on the review of related literature on the specific objectives of the study. Literature was reviewed on the following sub-headings:

Definition of Concepts

- Concept of Play
- Play in Early Childhood Education

Theoretical Framework

- Recapitulation Theory
- Recreation Theory
- Socio-Cultural Theory

Empirical Review

- How kindergarten teachers perceive playful activities.
- The role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities.
- Strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play.
- Challenges encountered in the use of play in public kindergartens.

2.1 Definition of Concept

The definition of concepts focused on the concept of play, types of play, and the relationship between play, learning and development.

2.1.1 The concept play

The perspective of children`s play was initially considered in education as a yardstick for development of pedagogy (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson &Hundeide, 2010).

There has been lots of research and findings produced over the years relating to the definition of play. Several researchers and theorists define play differently, however, many different perspective views on what play is overlapped with other views. Play can be viewed, conceptualized, and defined from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives.

Nowak, Nichols, and Coutts (2009) defined play as, "an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed and episodic". Play as pleasurable and an activity, is seen as a situation by which children learn and interact with the environment and the world around them (Nowak, et. al 2009). Gordon (2009) also argued that "play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected and making transformation possible." (p. 8). Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences. The voluntary movement of children which includes exploration, playing and learning according to their interests, offer them the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and level of maturation.

Additionally, Wood (2009) indicated that characteristics of play include intrinsic motivation, engagement; dependence on internal rather than external rules, control and autonomy, and attention to means rather than ends. Children formulate their own rules to suit and match with the play situation. Therefore, children experience the joy and skills development through self- motivation. According to Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) play is considered as a learning situation or an activity initiated by children, on the other hand, learning is regarded as a result of a practice or activity initiated by any adult to help children to learn. They further stated that play activities

as well as learning situations are as joyful since both play and learning are seen as an activity that is transgression. Play and learning are interrelated; the two words touched on each other in anearly childhood setting and further serves as an important process for promoting children‟s learning and development (Kieff &Casbergue, 2000). Play provides children the opportunity to discover the world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Also, children`s play promotes and enhances socio-emotional development, cognitive and physical skills that cannot be taught through formal classroom instruction (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007).

Fromberg and Gullo (1992) were also of the view that play enhances language development, social competence, creativity, imagination, and thinking skills. They talked about how play can support a child‟s learning such as concepts and ideas, interactions, emotional well-being and physical development. Play provides children with the opportunity to discover the world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Children are likely to be engaged in play activities that are relevant to them and can play and have an active participation. Additionally, play is pleasurable and can be defined as an activity requiring no end or goal only participation and fun (Nowak, et al., 2009).

One important aspect of children`s play to be considered is the use of play in early years setting. Combining play in the teaching process in the early years setting, there is the need for greater confidence among practitioners in approaching problems without fear and taking risks needed in the search for new ideas to help the development of children. Play is often regarded as cognitively challenging process, which requires the child to make use ability, memory, signs and symbols, cultural tools which includes development of language, social skills such as negotiations,

communication, planning and sharing and prediction (Fleer, 2010). Many skills that are needed for later life are developed through play and also are very important in a pre-school setting. Children will continue to make use of different learning situations, experiences and in remembrance for further learning. In general, play is considered as an important learning activity and developmentally appropriate which is considered valuable for all children (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). In contrast, however, play can also be seen as an unimportant or even harmful practice or activity both in the home and the school environment (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005; Scarlett, Naudeau, Salonius-Pasternak & Ponte, 2005; Sutton-Smith, 2001). The discourse of play both in theory and practice in early childhood education is very vital as stages of human evolution (Hyvonen, 2011).

2.1.2 Types of play

Given the general difficulty with defining play, and the recognition of its complexity, it is not surprising that there have been numerous attempts to categories different types of play. As Moyles (1989) has demonstrated, for every aspect of children‟s development, there is a form of play. However, in the contemporary psychological literature the various kinds of play are generally divided into five broad types based upon the developmental purposes which each serve, partly arising from the evolutionary analyses and how each relates to and supports children‟s learning. These types are commonly referred to as physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretence/ socio-dramatic play and games with rules (Power, 2000). Although each type of play has a main developmental function or focus, arguably all of them support aspects of physical, intellectual and social-emotional and creative growth. From all the available evidence, a balance of experience of each of these types of play is likely to be beneficial to children‟s development.

2.1.3 Physical play

Physical play was the earliest to evolve and can be observed in some reptiles and amphibians and most, if not all, mammals (Power, 2000). In human children it includes active exercise play (e.g.: jumping, climbing, dancing, skipping, bike riding and ball play), rough-and-tumble (with friends, siblings or parents/ guardians) and fine-motor practice (e.g.: sewing, colouring, cutting, junk modelling and manipulating action and construction toys). Physical play comprises of exercise play and fine motor play.

Exercise play begins to emerge during the second year of life and typically occupies around 20% of children‟s behaviour by the age of four to five years. The evidence suggests that this type of play is related to children‟s developing whole body and hand-eye co-ordination, and is important in building strength and endurance (Pellegrini &Smith, 1998).

The most extensively researched aspect of physical play, however, is „rough-and-tumble‟ play. It includes chasing, grappling, kicking, wrestling and rolling on the ground and appears to have evolved as a mechanism through which children learn to control aggression. It emerges slightly later than exercise play and is typical amongst early childhood learners. However, like most types of play, it continues to be enjoyed, usually between family members and close friends, right into adulthood. It is easily distinguishable from actual aggression by the evident enjoyment of the participants, and appears to be wholly beneficial. Jarvis (2000) research evidence suggests that it is clearly associated with the development of emotional and social skills and understandings. In human children, it is associated with the development of strong emotional bonds, or attachments, between children and their parents, and with school-

aged children‟s abilities to understand emotional expressions (Jarvis, 2000). A study by Mellen (2002) for example, looked at father-son rough and tumble behaviours that involved direct body contact in 157 suburban families in the United States and found that it related very strongly with three-year-old sons‟ social competence, as demonstrated in early childhood learners.

There is a concern that children, largely as a consequence of the pressures of urban living discussed above, with the loss of natural environments and concerns about safety, are over-supervised and do not have the opportunities for „risky‟ outdoor physical play that supports their developing independence, resourcefulness and self-regulation. A general recognition of this concern is at the basis of pressures to provide outdoor play spaces for children living in urban environments. Amongst early years practitioners these concerns have led to a recent resurgence in the provision of outdoor play, and an increasing interest in Forest schools and the outdoor schools in some areas of Scandinavia (Frost, 2010; Tovey, 2007).

Fine-motor play refers to a wide range of activities which support young children‟s development of their fine-motor hand and finger co-ordination skills. These activities are often solitary, can be beneficially supported by an adult (e.g.: sewing, construction) and, due to their absorbing nature, help children develop their concentration and perseverance skills.

2.1.4 Play with objects

Children‟s development through explorations, as young scientists, of the physical world and the objects they find within it is of great value to the wholistic development of the child (Power, 2000). Play with objects begins as soon as infants can grasp and hold on to them. Early investigative behaviours include mouthing/biting, rotating while looking, rubbing/stroking, hitting and dropping. This might be described as „sensori-motor‟ play when the child is exploring how objects and materials feel and behave, (Power, 2000). From around eighteen to twenty-four months toddlers begin to arrange objects, which gradually develops into sorting and classifying activities. By the age of four years, building, making and constructing behaviours emerge (Power, 2000).

As with all other types of play, play with objects often also incorporates other types of play, as it clearly has physical and manipulative aspects and often, in children, is carried out within a pretence or socio-dramatic context. When young children are making or building, they are also often developing a story or narrative (Power, 2000). It is a relatively well-researched type of play, as it is distinctively related to the development of thinking, reasoning and problem- solving skills. When playing with objects, children set themselves goals and challenges, monitor their progress towards them, and develop an increasing repertoire of cognitive and physical skills and strategies (Power, 2000). A study by Pellegrini and Gustafson (2005), for example, in which three to five-year olds were systematically observed over an entire school year, demonstrated that the amount of playful exploration, construction and tool use in which children engaged predicted their subsequent performance on physical problem-solving tasks. Play with objects is also particularly associated with the production of „private speech‟, with children commonly commentating on their activity. This

appears to have the function of helping the children to maintain their attention, keep their goals for the activity in mind, monitor their progress, make strategic choices regarding ways to proceed, and generally regulate themselves through the task. As a consequence, construction and problem-solving play is also associated with the development of perseverance and a positive attitude towards challenge (Sylva, Bruner & Genova, 1976).

Arising from these findings, a number of studies have investigated the use of constructional play as a kind of therapy with children in clinical groups characterised by problems with aspects of self-regulation, such as autism and (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) ADHD. Owens, Wood, andBennett (2009), for example, carried out an eighteen-week LEGO Therapy programme with six to eleven-year olds with high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome. Maladaptive behaviours decreased significantly more in the LEGO group than in a matched no intervention control group.

2.1.5 Symbolic Play

Symbolic play is a play that supports the development of technical abilities to express and reflect upon children‟s experiences, ideas, and emotions (Christie & Roskos, 2006). Humans are uniquely equipped to use a wide variety of symbolic systems including spoken language, reading, and writing, number, various visual media (painting, drawing, collage) music and so on. During the first five years of life, when children are beginning to master these systems, these aspects of their learning are an important element within their play (Christie & Roskos, 2006).

Play with language starts very early in life with children under the age of one-year-old playing with sounds, and, as they grow older, particularly playing with the sounds of the language or languages they are hearing around them. This play is a very active process and quickly develops into making up new words, playing with rhymes, and eventually young children‟s love of puns and other jokes with language. Extensive research has clearly established that this type of play is a powerful support for developing language abilities and, crucially, through its support for phonological awareness, impacts upon the ease with which young children develop early literacy skills (Christie & Roskos, 2006). By placing basic numeracy in meaningful, real life contexts, play involving counting and other basic mathematical operations supports young children‟s ability to engage with formal mathematics with confidence (Whitebread, 2000; Carruthers & Worthington, 2006).

Recent work on play has strongly supported Vygotsky‟s (1986) insight that there are very close links between early drawing and writing in young children‟s mark making. In fascinating studies of mark making amongst chimpanzees, for example, Matthews (2011) has shown that drawing was perhaps the earliest evolving type of symbolic representation, and continues to be a significant aspect of young children‟s symbolic play. Studies of children‟s drawings have demonstrated how through drawing, children gradually increase their „graphic vocabularies‟, and their ability to organise graphic elements into a pictorial representation (a kind of „graphic grammar‟)(Jolley, 2010; Ring, 2010). The evidence from these studies suggests that children‟s visual literacy (i.e. their ability to understand pictures, photographs, diagrams, scale models, plans, maps etc) is importantly enhanced by their experiences of playing with a variety of visual media.

Musical play is another very under-researched area, despite being a ubiquitous and highly significant form of play in all human cultures. From a very early age, children sing, dance and delight in exploring and making sounds of all kinds, with their bodies and with all kinds of objects. In extensive research of early mother-infant pre-linguistic interactions, Trevarthen (1999) has clearly illustrated the role of the human infant‟s innate response to rhythm and sounds in establishing early communicative abilities. A recent review of research in this area concluded that it seems likely that musical play, partly as a consequence of its powerfully social and interactive characteristics, supports a wide range of children‟s developing abilities, including those related to social interaction, communication, emotion understanding, memory, self-regulation and creativity (Pound, 2010). In a study which involved 96 four-year-olds in joint music making, Kirschner and Tomasello (2010) showed that these children significantly increased subsequent spontaneous cooperative and helpful behaviour, relative to a carefully matched control condition with the same level of social and linguistic interaction but no music.

2.1.6 Pretence/socio-dramatic play

Pretence/Socio-Dramatic play is often characterised and perceived as „free play‟. During socio-dramatic play children are obliged to follow the social rules governing the character they are portraying. Berk and colleagues report several studies with three and four-year olds demonstrating a clear link between the complexity of socio-dramatic play and improvement in social responsibility (Whitebread & Jameson, 2010). In the urbanised, technologically advanced modern world, this is clearly the most prevalent type of play amongst young children, emerging around the age of one year old. It is also the most heavily researched. High-quality pretence play has repeatedly been shown to be very closely associated with the development of

cognitive, social and academic abilities. Studies have reported the impact of play world experience on narrative skills in five to seven-year olds (Whitebread & Jameson, 2010), of pretence play on deductive reasoning and social competence, and of socio-dramatic play on improved „self-regulation" among young children who are prone to be highly impulsive.

A range of studies have supported Vygotsky"s (1978) insights concerning the impact of this type of play on children"s representational and self-regulatory abilities (Karpov, 2005). This is also a type of play in which a high prevalence of „private speech" is commonly observed (Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006). Paradoxically, however, a number of studies have shown that, in fact, it makes some of the greatest demands on children"s self-restraint, or self-regulation. O"Connor and Stagnitti, (2011) have recently reported on a study of thirty-five children aged five to eight in special schools, some of whom were offered a pretence play intervention. Findings revealed that the children participating in the play intervention, compared to a matched group who did not, showed a significant decrease in play deficits, became less socially disruptive and more socially connected with their peers.

An aspect of socio-dramatic play which often causes concern amongst parents and teachers is that related to play with guns. However, the research evidence suggests that these concerns are misplaced and that attempts by adults to discourage or forbid them are generally counter-productive. Gun play, similar to rough-and-tumble, is easily distinguishable from real aggression or violence. In this kind of play, as in all other aspects of socio-dramatic play, children are developing their co-operative and social skills in contexts which are salient to their interests, and which arise from their real and vicarious experiences (Levin, 2006).

2.1.7 Games with rules

Young children are strongly motivated to make sense of their world and, as part of this, they are very interested in rules. As a consequence, from a very young age, they enjoy games with rules, and frequently invent their own. Opie and Opie‟s (1959) collections of children‟s games and folklore are a testament to children‟s love of games with rules. These games include physical games such as chasing games, hide-and-seek, throwing and catching and the like as children mature. They get involved in more intellectual games such as board and card games, electronic and computer games, and the whole variety of sporting activities. As well as helping children to develop their understandings about rules, the main developmental contribution of playing games derives from their essentially social nature. While playing games with their friends, siblings and parents, young children are learning a range of social skills related to sharing, taking turns, understanding others‟ perspectives and so on (DeVries, 2006).

Allthough the use of electronic and computer games by today‟s children has been considered useful. It is another area which have generated anxiety for parents and teachers. The concerns here relate to violence and to the addictive nature of some games. However, the evidence in this area is equivocal. A recent survey of 346 children from the 7th and 8th grade of seven elementary schools in the United States, for example, found that playing videogames did not appear to take place at the expense of children‟s other leisure activities, social integration, and school performance. There was also no significant relationship between the amount of time children spent on videogames and aggressive behaviour. A positive relationship was found between time spent on videogames and a child‟s intelligence (Van Schie & Wiegman, 1997). Other studies in the UK have also shown, furthermore, that well-

designed computer games offering open-ended or problem-solving challenges to children are likely to share some of the benefits of problem-solving or constructional play with objects (Siraj-Blatchford &Whitebread, 2003).

2.1.8 Benefits of play

Play has enormous benefits in the development of the child. Present in this section of the literature are the following benefits:

i. Cognitive
ii. Physical development
iii. Intellectual development
iv. Social development/competence
v. Emotional development
vi. Socio-linguistic development

Explaining play in terms of different types of play as well as researching play as an aid to cognitive, social, and socio-linguistic development dominated developmental psychologists concerns for much of the 20th century. By the end of the century there were substantive claims for the value and significance of play in language and literacy learning (Roskos & Christie, 2000); emotional development (Erikson, 1963; Fein, 1985); social competence and peer group affiliation (Parten, 1932; Giffin, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978); spatial and mathematical learning (Guha, 1988); and the development of positive learning dispositions and orientations (Lieberman, 1977; Sylva, Bruner and Genova, 1976). Parten‟s (1932) categorization of play in terms of progressive levels of social participation was significant because it emphasised the role of social interaction in play. However, in more recent times, Parten‟s formulation has been criticised for implying that playing alone was less advanced, and that older

children engaging in solitary play were socially immature. She also underestimated very young children‟s ability to engage in social interaction and this has led to the erroneous view that babies and toddlers do not play „properly‟ (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003).

Piaget‟s (1962) conceptualisation of play as developing in stages defined by qualitatively different levels of thinking and increased levels of knowledge was particularly influential in ECCE. His constructivist approach, which is summarised in the research paper Children‟s early learning and development (French, 2007) suggested a dialogue between the child‟s cognitive structures, internal rules for processing information, and the external world. His cognitive play theory, which focused on the individual‟s interaction with the environment has been attributed as the basis for a „laissez-faire‟ free play curriculum, where children make the choices with the adult intervening as little as possible. This is often positioned in contrast to Vygotsky‟s social-cultural theory of development, which emphasised the role of adults and peers in development and learning (Smith, 1993).

Vygotsky argued that whilst play was not the predominant feature of childhood, it was a leading factor in development (Berk and Winsler, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). His attention was focused on the cognitive functioning and social rules involved in maintaining peer interaction in socio-dramatic play. His elevation of socio-dramatic play, as the most valued form of play in early childhood has been hugely influential in early childhood pedagogy (Bodrova& Leong, 2005; Karlsson, Lohmander, Pramling, Samuelsson, 2003). His theoretical framework, incorporating the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), challenged the efficacy of a free-play curriculum, and suggested that adults need to take an active role in stimulating learning in the

context of play. However, this did not mean formal academic teaching. Rather, learning was understood as taking place in interactions between children and adults, between peers and in the context of real-life everyday situations.

A typology of play considered useful in describing the different forms of children‟s play is that developed by Hutt, Goldmintz & Schaefer (1989). Here, play is grouped into three categories: epistemic, ludic and games with rules. Epistemic play, typically associated with children in the first two years of life, refers to exploratory play with objects and materials whereby children gather knowledge about the world through their senses. Ludic play refers to children‟s imaginative, fantasy and socio-dramatic play i.e. „what if‟ scenarios or pretence. In games with rules, children design their own games with negotiated rules and in time. They also partake in more conventional games with „external‟ rules. Vygotsky identified two critical features of pretence play that described its uniqueness. Firstly, all representational play creates an imaginary situation that permits children to grapple with unrealizable desires and so promote self-regulation. Secondly, play always contains rules for behaviour (Berk &Winsler, 1995).

The prevailing approach to considering play in ECCE pedagogy throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was to link the provision of different types of play to the principal domains of child development and to look for developmental progression or „signs of maturing‟ within specific play behaviours. The notion of „developmentally appropriate practice‟ (DAP) as set out in a document published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredecamp and Copple, 1992) in the United States, was particularly influential and became a powerful construct in Western ECCE practice. Play as an important vehicle

for children‟s all-round development, as well as a reflection of their development is one of the key principles informing DAP (Nutbrown, 2006). Different forms of play incorporate cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral challenges and support children to develop strengths in a range of areas. Table 2.1 summarizes what are commonly viewed as the most salient forms of play in terms of the holistic development of the child. The National Counsel for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Framework for Early Learning moves away from the earlier approach to linking the provision of different types of play to the principal domains of child development and to view the child instead as developing through four interconnected themes Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking (NCCA 2004). Just as domains of children‟s development are closely related and intertwined, so too, are the different forms of play. In practice, when children are playing, their behaviours may reflect more than one type of play identified above. Furthermore, children often display preferences for types of play.

Table 1: Hutt's Typology of Play

Play					
Epistemic Behaviour		Games with Rules	Ludic Behaviour		
Problem solving		Co-operative	Symbolic		
Exploration		Games of chance	Representative object	Immaterial fantasy	
		Games of skill	Fantasy object	Fantasy person roles	
Productive		Competitive	Repetitive	Innovative	Perseverative
Materials	Acquisition of skills				

Source: Hutt, (1979).

2.2 Early Childhood Education

Outside a child‟s home context, Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings are one of the first places that children go to learn and develop new skills. Teachers play a major role in children‟s social and emotional development because children observe their teachers‟ words, actions, and body language (Ministry of Education, 1998). ECE teachers may also be the first important non-family adults that interact with young children on a regular basis, therefore, ECE settings provide the opportunity to help address behaviour problems that have developed earlier in the child‟s life.

Children enter childcare from 0 to 6 years old or attend preschool from 3 to 5 years old. In New Zealand, although attending an ECE is not compulsory, over 96% of children under the age of five years attend ECE settings such as day-care, preschool, or kindergarten, averaging 20 hours per week (Education Counts, 2014).

Early childhood teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the development of young children and provide multiple learning experiences through teacher and peer interactions (Church, 2004; Coplan, Bullock, Archbell&Bosacki, 2015). They also provide an opportunity to divert a child away from an antisocial pathway before the pattern of challenging behaviours becomes consolidated and resistant to change (Advisory Group for Conduct Problems, 2009). Teacher awareness of children‟s emotions, needs, and wellbeing can encourage children to engage more in positive behaviours and less in challenging behaviours (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2012). There are various studies, however, that indicate that preschool or day care teachers express concerns in regard to managing children‟s behavioural difficulties, overactivity, inattention, and relationships with other children (Alter, Walker & Landers, 2013;

Campbell, 1995; Mitchell & Hastings, 2001; Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri and Goel, 2011).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study was underpinned by the psychoanalytic theory of play, recapitulation theory, and socio-cultural theory. In quantitative studies, one uses theory deductively and places it toward the beginning of the plan for a study. With the objective of testing or verifying a theory rather than developing it, the researcher advances a theory, collects data to test it, and reflects on the confirmation or disconfirmation of the theory by the results (Creswell, 2003). The theory becomes a framework for the entire study, an organizing model for the research questions or hypotheses and for the data collection procedure (Creswell, 2003).

2.3.1 Psychoanalytic theory of play

The psychoanalytic view of play was developed by Freud (1939) and extended by Erik Erikson and other Freudian followers. This theory is interested in helping children whose problems stem from difficulty in managing feelings. Freud saw the child as motivated to seek pleasure and avoid pain. He also believed that play was cathartic, in that children at play control situations that are normally out of their control. His premise was that children play to disengage themselves of the negative emotions or feelings brought on by traumatic events; and that play allows them to develop a more equal emotional equilibrium. Play enables children to communicate their feelings. The content of play has strong affective tones. From this perspective, play benefits both social and emotional development.

Freud, an Austrian physician and neurologist, did not develop a specific theory on play, but his writings reflect his views on the importance of play in children‟s emotional development. Erik Erikson (1994) studied with Freud and shared a similar psychoanalytical view on play. Sluss (2004) contended that the two "differed in the area of Erikson‟s explanation of unconscious motivation in terms of psychosocial not psychosexual forces" (p. 53). Erikson focused on stages of personality development throughout one‟s life cycle. The first three stages focus on the infant and young child developing a sense of trust, autonomy and initiative. Wortham (2002) argued,

> "As the child matures through the stages, favorable or unfavorable results occur, depending on whether or not the child was successful in resolving the crisis of development results in desirable qualities; conversely, negative resolution of a stage can have long-lasting personality effects later in life" (p. 49).

Erikson viewed play as an expressive behavior that led to both emotional and social development through mastery of psychosocial crises. According to Erikson, children play to enact the past, the present, and the future, and these play experiences help children settle conflicts they will encounter at all developmental stages. Erikson (1985) recognized three major purposes of play:

i. play as ego mastery for emotional development,
ii. play as social,
iii. play as a life-long experience.

Erikson viewed play as a way to reduce anxiety by giving the child control over the issue at hand and providing an acceptable venue for release. Erikson‟s view on play is used primarily by play therapists, but his work has influenced current play scholarship.

2.3.2 Recapitulation theory

The "recapitulation theory" of play was proposed by Hall in 1906. He viewed play as the enactment of stages of human evolution, e.g; animal, savage, nomad, agricultural, tribal member and so on (as cited in Hughes, 1999). Hall proposed that as children developed, they passed through stages recapitulating development of the human race. According to Hall, the reason children engaged in play was instinctive and for the satisfaction of the need for expression of these interests.

Groos (1898) believed that play strengthened instincts that were needed for the future. In his view, children were born with imperfect and underdeveloped survival instincts. Groos claimed that play enabled children to practice and perfect these essential skills. His "practice theory" implied that early involvement leads to learning routines for productive work and survival in the future (Scwartzman, 1978, pg. 100).

2.3.3 Sociocultural theory of play

This theory considers social, cultural, and historical factors that may influence cognitive development during social interactions. Vygotsky (1896-1934), Piaget‟s Russian contemporary, was interested in how children learn and how learning contributes to development. One contribution he made to the field was his articulation and demonstration on how a childrens‟s development rests on their engagement with their culture.

Vygotsky saw play as a way to construct knowledge during social interactions with the world and as a source of cognitive development. He believed that parents and teachers can assist children‟s learning by working within their zone of proximal development. In the zone of proximal development, children exhibit higher levels of competence than when outside the zone.

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

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

Sociocultural theory or „cultural-historical psychology is a theory of the development of higher mental activities which regards social interaction as the core of communication and learning process. Its origin is derived from the sociological and economic writings of Marx and Engels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The theory emerged from the work of the Russian psychologists Vygotsky (1978), Leont‟ev (1981), and Wertsch (1985).

One of the outstanding features of sociocultural theory is considering learning as social in nature where meaning is derived through language use within the social context. Contrary to the followers of cognitive theories who believed in mediation between stimulus and the response, Vygotsky‟s (1978) theory investigates the context of the behavior or the social situation where the action occurs. The basic assumption

in Vygotsky‟s theory is the idea that psychological structures do not exist in the individual‟s mind; rather, they are formed as a result of interaction with the social context. In other words, the emergence of mental functions depends on social interaction.

According to Mitchell and Myles (2004) sociocultural theory views learners as active constructs of their own learning environment. Confirming Mitchell and Myle‟s viewpoint, Guoxing (2004) stated that learners in this sense are responsible for their own learning environment and the environment can nurture and scaffold them (Aimin, 2013). Accordingly, teachers are seen as active constructors of their own teaching environment. Whatever teachers think of learners‟ language learning will definitely affect their constructions of their teaching environment, though learners are the main focus of the teaching activities. Teachers will reconstruct their perceptions of L2 through practice and progress in language learning and teaching.

It is worth noting here that the main focus of the sociocultural perspective is not on the individual but on the individual‟s surroundings. Claiming that learning is a social activity, sociocultural experts such as Cole and Engeström (1993), Van Lier (2000), and Lantolf (2000) made a shift in their attention from individual cognition into mental activity of members of the same social community. Wertsch (1991), for example, emphasizes that sociocultural point of view should be distinguished from the other perspectives (e.g., constructivism) based on the context or surrounding of the learners. Learning is considered as the product of shared activity and the traditional teacher-student relationship should be changed to one that leads to collaborative learning (Zhang, Fanyu, & Du 2013). In this sense, solutions to learners‟ problems are gained through the involved participants‟ or members‟ behaviours in a shared context.

The „expert" member or knowledgeable other assists other members who need help in the learning process. This guidance is stopped when the members who need help can act independently. This problem-solving process is accomplished by two learners who possess different levels of knowledge and experiences. In other words, as a result of this guidance, a novice gradually becomes the effective member of that community.

As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) state, "successful learning involves shifting control within activities from the social to the individual, from the external to within self" (p. 232). This is evident in Vygotsky"s (1981) description of cultural development:

> "Any function in the child"s development appears twice or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category" (p. 163).

Expressed differently, the most significant contribution of sociocultural perspective to learning and consequently decreasing learners" problems is providing a supportive environment for cognitive development. Thus, for any learner to be successful in language learning, during social interaction within a classroom, it is necessary to change his learning status from first dependent other-regulation to subsequent independent self-regulation.

Mediation

Mediation is one of the most significant constructs of Vygotsky"s (1978) theory, which is also central to this study. According to Vygotsky, humans do not make their relationship with the outer world only through direct stimulus-response reflexes; rather, they have the ability to use physical tools to make indirect connections and mediate their relationship. In so doing, they can regulate and control their behaviors via psychological and technical tools or artifacts. The physical tools mediating these

relationships are generated by human cultures and are gradually transferred to the next generation. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is a mediated process. Mitchell and Myles (2004) believe that "learning is mediated partly through learner‟s developing use and control of mental tools" (p. 195).

Lantolf (2000) presented three versions of mediation: mediation by others, mediation by self through private speech, and mediation by artifacts (e.g., tasks and technology). Being grounded in Vygotskian perspective and considering Lantolf‟s taxonomy of mediation, this study treats mediation by others as the domain of the teacher of the EFL classroom with the focus on the teacher‟s teaching and scaffolding methods. Human development is not just the outcome of one‟s personal attempt and individual function but it is a result of a system of social connections and relations.

Three conceptual resources are introduced by Gao (2010) which mediate language learners‟ language learning: learning discourses, artifacts and material conditions, and social agents (p. 21). By contextual resources, Gao means any learner‟s beliefs and values present in the learning context in relation with foreign language learning which may affect learning processes in general and strategy use in particular. He emphasized that the function of learners‟ discourses is different at the micro-level and macro-level, as micro-level discourses reinforce the learners to be responsible for their learning processes. For instance, they can control and identify the steps required for removing a learning problem. However, at the maro-level discourses are indicators of learners‟ values in learning a target language along with the goals they intend to obtain through strategy use.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding

To attain self-regulation, individual learners need to expand their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). As Smidt (2009) noted, the ZPD is one of Vygotsky‟s central contributions to learning and teaching that arises from his focus on the significance of cultural tools and social learning. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). To bridge the gap between Vygotsky‟s theory of ZPD and its utility in L2 classroom, Ohta (2001) presents an adapted version of Vygotsky‟s definition suitable to this context: "For the L2 learner, the ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined through language produced collaboratively with a peer or teacher" (p. 9). From Vygotsky‟s point of view the difference between potential level and actual development is that the former serves more as an indication of mental development than the latter as only a learner with an advanced level of development is able to react to the support provided by the more experienced other.

Vygotsky (1981) believed that during socialization and interacting with others the child is faced with participating in activities with others. This is the first step for the learner to be part of the shared culture through sharing something with another member in that community. Thus, his cognitive development would take place through involvement or "through participation in an ongoing social world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 50). Nassaji and Cumming (2000) conducted a case study to explain and illustrate different features of the ZPD in language teaching and learning. To do so, they analyzed 95 exchanges obtained from a six-year-old Farsi speaker‟s dialogue

journal and that of a Canadian teacher who were working interactively with each other for more than 10 months. Their research indicated how both teacher and student constructed a conversation, which involved "intricate patterns of complementary, asymmetrical scaffolding" (Nassaji& Cumming 2000, p. 103).

2.4 Empirical Framework

The empirical framework of the study comprised literature review on the following themes generated from the objectives; Early Childhood Teachers‟ perception of playful activities; Early learners/kindergarteners view playful activities; the role of Early Childhood Teachers in supporting and guiding play activities; methods used by Early Childhood Teachers to improve play in selected; the challenges encountered in the use of play.

2.4.1 Early childhood teachers' perception of playful activities

The concept of play and pedagogy influences the conceptualization and perspectives of practitioners`. Practitioners` perceptions and conceptualization of play are very vital because practitioners play very important role in managing classroom situation in the pre-school. Practitioners` also create a cultural balanced environment and put into practice content and policies of the educational goals.

Research has shown and confirmed that pre-school practitioners‟ balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process (Babić& Ironic, 2004; Davis, 1997; Einarsdóttir, 1998). This involves interactions between the child and the practitioner during the process of teaching and learning. It is during such interactions that the practitioner identifies how the child may be assisted in learning and what the child is capable of doing with appropriate support. Teacher-child collaboration within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of the children is

critical for effective teaching and learning (Chaiklin, 2003). The use of play in a pre-school is to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning (Hyvonen, 2011). In defining the practice and use of play in pre-school, teacher`s embraced the themes enshrined in the national curriculum. Therefore, teachers are to plan activities that reflect the aims and objectives in conformity with the educational goals in the national curriculum.

Furthermore, teachers based their perceptions on both Paget‟s theory and developmentally appropriate activities (DAP) (Pramling, Samuelsson, & Fleer, 2009) to reflect children`s play. Also, practitioner`s support and execute educational goals and philosophy in relation to teaching and learning of children. In pre-school, children`s play are considered as an educational tool for teaching and learning. Therefore, practitioners concept and perspective of play is to promote the development of motor skills, cognitive, social, and emotional competencies for children. Similarly, the use of play helps children to think logically, acquire language skills, share, take turns, cooperate, and generalized symbols that are useful in the classroom. Sutton-Smith‟s (1997) discussion of the rhetoric‟s of child play, he described the tutorial stimulation effect, or the view that the increase in children‟s competencies is caused not only by the play forms introduced, but also with the relationship between the teacher and children. Therefore, since teaching and the importance of children`s play could not be separated, practitioners‟ personal philosophy influences the pedagogy in the pre-school.

Children‟s participation in interesting playful activities enhanced self- reliant learning (Dodge &Bickart, 2000). Practitioners, however, conceptualised children`s play as a joyous moment in the early years setting. The planning of classroom activities and the

selection of play materials from the environment are the challenges for the practitioners. Nevertheless, the interest of the children in participation in both the classroom and play activities is paramount. This was agreed by Wood (2010) who stated that, the homogenization of children`s practice turn to eliminate or reduce the individuality of each child. Practitioners should prepare the environment and plan experiences that are significant for children‟s learning, as well as the day to day activities to give them opportunities to understand their environment.

Central to a wider pedagogical role in play is the importance of achieving a balance between pedagogical interactions (specific behaviours on the parts of adults) and pedagogical framing involving the behind the scenes aspects of pedagogy that include planning, resources and the establishment of routines (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva 2004). This balance is evident in two projects: The Effective Provision of Preschool Experiences (EPPE) and Researching Effective Pedagogy in Early Years (REPEY) (Sylva, Watkins & Mortimore, 2004). The authors discussing these projects maintained that achieving balance requires more than setting up an interesting environment to promote children‟s play. Educators need to go beyond this and engage children in activities. This involves identifying „critical moments‟ in which there is the potential to „lift the level of thinking‟ through the teacher‟s use of scaffolding, conversation or instruction (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva 2004). These projects reinforce the Vygotskyan, social-constructivist foundations for play discussed earlier. A distinct finding of these projects is the link to the importance of shared thinking. This is a process whereby teachers and children are mutually involved in cognitive construction. Findings from the REPEY project show that, though children may have freely chosen to play within an instructive learning environment, adult interventions may be especially effective (Siraj-Blatchford, 2002).

Practitioners perceived the integration of play in pre-school as a means to help children develop skills for learning purposes. Practitioners conceptualised the use of play as an educational pedagogy tool. Nonetheless, children`s play in pre-school is often used as a time- filler and losses its purpose. Practitioners` further perceived children play as a learning process but not the final product. Simultaneously, more responsibilities are expected from practitioners in pre-school settings. The educational pedagogy of children‟s play should be based on activities rather than on academic skills (Marjatta, 2002). According to Sutton- Smith (as cited in Sandseter, 2009) these play activities provide children with an experience of arousal, excitement, fun, sense of belonging, joy, and light-heartedness.

Children develop through play and it is the best way of learning for the future. Accordingly, Sutton-Smith (1997) argued that, children‟s play provides experiences and excitements that are pleasurable, which they want to do it again. Similarly, children like to be engaged in play activities that are relevant to them. Bae (2010) also agreed that in the early years‟ settings, practitioners must be attentive, listen to and attempt to interpret children‟s body language and reactions, and must be observant in relation to their actions and in-actions, aesthetic expressions and eventually their verbal communications.

The Bodrova (2008) also pointed out that practitioners conceptualised children`s play by using different activities to influence children to play. In play-based teaching, the most important thing is not the satisfaction the child receives, but the objective used and the meaning of the playful activities deployed that the children are unaware. When children play, the domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) are enhanced. How can these be possible? Practitioners` perception of children play and

learning is a contributory factor for these developments. This transcends through the planned learning activities and appropriate teaching strategies used by the teachers. Reasoning, problem solving, classification, comparing, generalization of concepts is all derived through the play and learning process, these are made possible by teacher"s guidance (Ministry of Education Science & Sports, 2007). Practitioners use play in a wide range of activities such as sorting, pairing, matching, comparing, counting, shapes and many others to help the child reason logically, discover new ideas and develops interest in the area later in life. Practitioners see themselves as pivotal support for children`s play in the teaching and learning situations. Although practitioners value the role of play in skills development and learning among children, they are unaware of how to conceptualise it in an instructional manner (Saracho & Spodek, as cited in Haney and Bissonnette, 2011). Practitioners should also be more knowledgeable and interested in children`s play both in content and pedagogy. However, the following were outlined as important "knowledge" and "skills" for practitioners in dealing with children`s classroom situations by the OECD`s (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (1994: p. 14-15).

Content knowledge or knowledge of the substantive curriculum areas required in the classroom; Pedagogic skills including the acquisition and ability to use a repertoire of teaching strategies; Reflection and the ability to be self critical, the hallmark of teacher professionalism; Empathy and commitment to the acknowledgment of the dignity of others. These knowledge and skills are very important for teachers in dealing with children to help them in the teaching and learning process. Managerial competence, as teachers assume a range of managerial responsibilities within and outside the classroom.

2.4.2 The role of early childhood teachers in supporting and guiding play activities

One of the cues children use to define play and not play situations, and has been utilized in the studies above, is the presence of a teachers. When a teacher is present children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning. Further support for this link comes from the Cambridge shire Independent Learning in the Foundation Stage (C. Ind.Le) Project mentioned previously. This study has shown that children display more evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working unsupervised (Whitebread, 2007). This is surprising when the role of the teachers in early years education is considered essential in enabling development (Department for Education and Skills, 2007a; Devereux & Miller, 2003; Edgington, 2004). In relation to play in the classroom a „pedagogy of play" has been built around this belief which is constructed as how teachers make provision for play, plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Constructs for supporting or enhancing learning, otherwise known as teaching or pedagogy (the practice of teaching), have been proposed by Bernstein (1996). „Classification" refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between subjects when subjects are clearly defined then the boundaries are strong, if subjects are merged then boundaries are weak. „Framing" refers to the relationship between teacher and pupil and the degree of control between them. If framing is strong then control rests with the teacher and if weak control rests more with the pupil. Strong classification and framing denotes a visible pedagogy and weak classification and framing denotes an invisible one.

An invisible pedagogy is one traditionally observed in infant classes (Bernstein, 1975). However, Brooker (2002) has proposed that an invisible pedagogy marginalizes children who are from cultural backgrounds with different expectations concerning education whilst Emilson and Folkesson (2006) and Payler (2007) proposed that a visible pedagogy reduces children‟s participation. All these studies indicate that ideally framing should be neither weak nor strong resulting in a pedagogy in which control is shared. This view of pedagogy and the construct of framing concurs with the theory of affordances and viewing teachers presence as an emotional or social affordance. As previously stated, depending on the behaviour of the teachers, their presence affords children freedom, participation in activities and a sense of control. Whether or not a teachers is present also has an impact on choice for children and this again gives children control during an activity.

Research on effective early years practice has generally shown that programmes involving direct instruction or more formal approaches to teaching show limited and short-term gains in children‟s learning, increase stress and anxiety and demotivate children (Burts, 1993; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels & Milburn, 1995; Sylva &Nabuco, 1996; Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule & Trew, 2010; Walsh., 2006). These programmes would be viewed as strongly framed using Bernstein‟s classification. Findings from the longitudinal High/Scope Perry Pre-school project, in which children are encouraged to plan their own activities for some of the time, demonstrate that children make considerable social gains over time compared to direct instruction programmes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Also, findings from the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (Siraj- Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002) show that effective settings use a combination of Teachers -led

and child-led activities, in keeping with a style of framing which is neither strong nor weak.

The shift in thinking about the role of teachers in children‟s play has led to a more detailed examination of practitioners‟/teachers‟ beliefs about the role of play in children‟s learning as well as an analysis of their interactions with children during play activities, using structured observations or video recordings. The findings from these research studies are increasingly important, especially as play-based pedagogies become the common approach across the UK for the first years of primary school.

The role of teachers in children‟s play is a complex and under-researched area and so, not surprisingly, a number of slightly different views were expressed by our European experts. On the one hand Brostrom (2003) expressed the view that the full potential of play can only be unlocked by active teachers or parents. On the other hand, Baumgartner, Marín and Muchacka, (2000) were of the view that children‟s play doesn‟t need teachers supervision. Teachers should provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering. However, these recommendations varied mostly in response to the situation in their own country rather than in substance. So, for example, Denmark has a lot of free play in schools and teachers tend not to involve themselves or participate in children‟s play, and so Broström, the Danish (2004) expert, recommended more teachers involvement and more structure, which he believes would be beneficial for children. On the other hand, in France children‟s play opportunities are often more structured, and so Brougère, the French expert, recommended more free play where children make their own decisions. Clearly, both recognise that there is value in a variety of play situations, and so would recommend a balanced diet of free, child-initiated play, play between

children and Teachers, and so on. This predominant view concerning a balance between teachers -child play and teachers-free play manifested itself most clearly in a general consensus around the view that a teacher who pays attention, listens to the children and talks to them, will be more beneficial than teacher who structure and direct the child‟s activity. Certainly, some evidence suggests that, if a teacher organises the play, children are more interested in capturing the teachers‟ attention and are less motivated to participate with their peers in shared activities.

The classic research by Bennett, Wood and Rogers, (1997) studied nine teachers in reception classrooms for 4-5-year-old in England, before the introduction of the new English Foundation Stage. Teachers‟ beliefs about the role of play were examined through interviews and discussions, and children‟s play activities in the classroom were videoed. The videos were then used to prompt the teachers‟ reflections on whether their intentions and plans were realized in their classroom activities. There was good agreement among the teachers about the purposes of play and its relationship to learning. The defining qualities of play, according to the teachers, were intrinsic motivation and child-initiation. The teachers‟ theories of play were translated into practice through planning and organisation, the environment and their intentions for learning. Overall, planning was characterized by broad developmental aims rather than what the children would learn through the specific play activities. Their more specific intentions were mainly around language development and socialization. When the teachers viewed the videos, they noted many examples where there was a mismatch between their theories about play and their activities. For example, often the reception-age children lacked the social, physical and cognitive skills to engage successfully in play, to follow through their plans, negotiate, play co-operatively or resolve conflict. When a teachers was not available or did not intervene, the play

sometimes broke down, leaving the children frustrated and de-motivated. Also, the ways the teachers conceptualized their role theoretically was not always consistent with how they managed the classroom. Often the play activities were more teacher-led than child-initiated, even for activities which the teachers felt strongly should remain the child‟s world (e.g., role play). Wood and Bennett (2007) concluded that there were gaps between the rhetoric and reality of play, particularly in primary classrooms where the constraints on the timetable, low ratio of Teachers to children, and the limitations on space added to the difficulties which the teachers had in figuring out an appropriate role in the children‟s play. During the evaluation of the Enriched Curriculum, interviews with teachers has also shown that they have a better understanding of their role in more structured, teacher-led activities and that some teachers struggled to cope with their role during structured play (Sproule, 2005).

Other studies have drawn attention to the limitations of free-play in Scottish pre-schools for 4-5-year-old in the context of children interacting freely with ICT. Plowman and Stephen (2005) noted that children‟s freedom to choose when to play with the computer led to very varied patterns of engagement, from very high levels (e.g., sustained interaction for 15 minutes) to children trying different games at random or just wandering off or becoming frustrated after unsuccessful attempts to complete a task or a game. Using an explicit socio-cultural framework, Plowman and Stephen (2007) created a pedagogical framework called „guided interaction‟ to describe how children‟s interactions with computers and other forms of ICT can be more actively supported in pre-school settings (and by implication in early primary school settings following play-based pedagogies). Guided interaction consists of a proximal mode where the teachers and child (or group of children) are directly interacting with the computer (or other device) and consists of such pedagogical

moves as demonstrating, explaining, instructing, modelling, prompting, enjoying, providing feedback, etc. The framework also consists of distal pedagogical actions that are one step removed from direction interactions, such as arranging access to the ICT, modelling, planning a range of activities, providing resources and identifying the next steps. Although only proximal interactions would normally be termed as „scaffolding", Plowman and Stephen point out that the intention for guided interaction at the proximal level is reflected in the planning at the distal level. For example, they noted that practitioners who did not plan for sustained interactions were more likely to respond reactively to events (helping children with turn-taking or managing the time spent on the computer) rather than engaging in joint problem-solving.

Research on teachers -child interactions in early years" settings is beginning to make more explicit the range of pedagogical possibilities used by high quality early years" teachers and practitioners. For example, drawing on the results of the Competent Child longitudinal study in New Zealand (Wylie, Thompson & Lythe, 1999) that identified the quality factors in early years" settings that predicted children"s competence at 8 years of age, Dunkin and Hanna (2001) created a teaching resource, called Thinking ogether. Thinking Together elaborates a range of highquality Teachers -child interactions that can occur in playful settings. The main point is that high-quality interactions are motivated by the „genuine interest" of the teachers in what the child is doing and are characterized by the teachers listening and extending the child"s thinking and knowledge. The latter is achieved by using open-ended question or comments, giving the child the time to respond, by being responsive to conversations initiated by the child, and using knowledge of the child to extend the interaction. These characteristics are reminiscent of „sustained shared thinking" identified in the REPEY research in the UK (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) where

Teachers and children work together „to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend a narrative" (p. 718). Dunkin and Hanna"s resource goes on to illustrate a range of roles that Teachers can adopt and that can shape the interaction and set the tone. They identify the following roles:

The facilitator: when the teachers helps children to sustain their play by providing strategies and ideas, extends their thinking, gives children time to think and to speak, supports recall and creates opportunities for children to make the next steps; The co-learner/co-explorer in this role the teacher; models the role he or she would wish to see the child taking, thus enabling the child to make his/her own discoveries and develop problem-solving skills. The role to be modelled might include looking for resources or information, asking a more knowledgeable person for help and struggling with a problem. An important part of this role is modelling language.

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

The planner; teachers can plan to interact with particular children and to build up an interest or strength they have shown, or as part of their observation and assessment. There are overlaps between these roles and other frameworks that have been referred to in earlier sections of this review. For example, the „facilitator" role is probably most

similar to the concept of scaffolding and the „planner" role is an example of distal guided interaction in the Fabian & Dunlop, (2007) framework.

Besides those activities already mentioned, the teacher and the school can actively prepare children for moving on to a new situation (Broström, 2003, 2007), plan transitional activities (Dunlop & Fabian, 2005; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007), develop buddy programmes (Dockett & Perry, 2001) and establish strong communication between teachers of successive classes or between pre-school and school (Margetts, 1999). Research shows that preparation for the move from Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 has not been as widespread (Parsons & Stephenson, 2002). In children having major difficulties, Brostrom (2003) suggestd that the practitioner/teacher who is well known to the child can act as a useful mediator at times. There is increasing realisation also that if practitioners and/or teachers want to know the effect of transitions on children, one useful route is to ask the children themselves (Einarsdóttir, 2007). This has been part of local research into transitions (Walsh et al., 2008). This kind of research has revealed that children have both positive and negative feelings about transitions. Positive ideas include having "real big toys up there", learning "lots of new things" and even looking forward to added restrictions such as not talking in class and having to line up in an orderly way.

2.4.3 Methods used by early childhood teachers to improve play

Pedagogy (and pedagogical interactions) concerns how adults in early years settings engage with children to achieve developmental objectives, and what directs their methods. Specifically, pedagogy refers to

> "that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment" (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

It concerns the how of adult and child interaction, which is particularly important in an ECEC context, given how children learn and develop during early childhood. How children learn and develop at this stage is subject not only to what is taught but more importantly, how it is facilitated (Anders, 2015). Consequently, pedagogy has a significant effect upon the (process) quality of Early Childhood Education Curriculum (ECEC) and the impact ECEC can have on children. Effective pedagogies facilitate positive interactions, by structuring environments and planning activities that fully engage children. This in turn enhances the children"s cognitive, linguistic and social development, since positive relationships have the most consistent and enduring influence on a child"s development (Bowman, 2001; Shonkoff & Philips, 2000). Characteristics of effective pedagogy include nurturing and consistent relationships, child- and age-appropriate behaviour, a positive class- or playroom environment, and domain-specific stimulation in areas such as verbal and pre-reading literacy, early numeracy, and science (Shonkoff & Philips, 2000).

Naturally, pedagogical activities, techniques or strategies differ across countries and cultures. These may vary between national and regional contexts, and between individual ECEC settings (Bowman, 2001). A number of factors are at play, such as a

country‟s political system and policy interests, its overarching pedagogical theory or approach, and the alignment of the ECEC system with formal schooling (ibid.). In Germany‟s federal political system, for example, many different policies and regulations are set at federal state level, and policies and regulations therefore differ between states. In the United Kingdom, England‟s pedagogical guidance and curriculum differ from Scotland‟s. Many countries, including New Zealand, Japan and Denmark, allow ECEC settings to choose their own pedagogical approach. But in France, preschool (écolesmaternelles) curricula and teacher training are aligned with primary school education, which results in similar pedagogical approaches in different educational contexts.

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

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

Carnine, 1982). Accordingly, the direct instruction approach views learning as teacher-directed rather than child-directed. Marcon (1999) described the direct instruction approach as being highly prescriptive in that lessons can be

> "(a) scripted to assure consistency in presentation across teachers, (b) carefully sequenced with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring student progress, and (c) consistently focused on academic instruction with much of the available school day allocated to practice and drills in reading, language, and math" (p. 1).

The direct instruction approach has also been defined as teacher-led sessions utilized to teach basic skills with a focus on repetition and practice in individual, small and large group contexts (Golbeck, 2001). Grounded in constructivist theories, such as the work of Vygotsky (1896-1934), the child-centered approach to early childhood education views learning as child- directed rather than teacher-directed (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Instead of enforcing a core set of basic skills, the child-entered approach is based on the idea that children learn basic skills when they have freedom to think, experience, explore, question, and search for answers about the world through self-directed play. Within this approach two types of play can occur: free play and guided play. In free play, children can "freely decide" what to do, with whom, and in what area of the classroom (Johnson & Yawkey, 1999; Pellegrini, 2009; Sutton-Smith, 2001). In comparison, during guided play, children‟s natural curiosity, exploration, and play are thought to be guided by the teachers to promote learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For example, teachers may build on children‟s self-directed play during guided play by asking questions or expanding on children‟s observations.

Studies of the child-centered and direct instruction approaches suggest that both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children‟s learning and development (Marcon, 2002; Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986; Stipek & Byler, 2004). For example, considerable support has been provided for the effectiveness of both approaches on children‟s development of academic skills (i.e., literacy and mathematics) Parker, 1983; Marcon, 2002; Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Miller et al., 1975; Schweinhart et al., 1986; Stipek & Byler, 2004). Furthermore, the child-centered approach has been positively related to children‟s development across both social (e.g., ability to interact with peers) and affective domains (e.g., school liking/avoidance; Marcon, 1999; 2002; Stipek et al., 1995; Stipek et al., 1998).

Given the research supporting the effectiveness of both approaches, the majority of early education programmes today use a mix of child-centered and direct instruction approaches (Stipek & Byler, 2004). In fact, the majority of Head Start programmes follow the Creative Curriculum for Preschool, which suggests that “because children have unique learning styles and needs” teachers should utilize both direct instruction and child- centered approaches (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002; p.173). Unfortunately, a lack of standards dictating how to use both approaches within the same classroom has resulted in inconsistent activities across early education classrooms. Teachers are using both approaches without empirical support regarding how these two approaches impact children‟s learning within mixed-method classrooms (i.e., classrooms using both child- centered and direct instruction approaches). Research is needed to develop standards and guide practice in mixed-method classrooms so that each approach is utilized in the most effective way to target specific skills.

Existing research comparing educational approaches is limited in the degree to which it can inform practice in mixed-method classrooms (i.e., classrooms using both child-centered and direct instruction approaches). Prior research examining child- centered and direct instruction approaches compared the effectiveness of each approach by comparing classrooms (Karnes, 1983; Marcon, 2002; Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Miller et al., 1975; Schweinhart et al., 1986; Stipek & Byler, 2004). For example, a classroom using the child-centered approach was compared to a classroom using a direct instruction approach. Many of these early studies did not make efforts to ensure similarity in schools, classrooms, or teachers on dimensions other than instructional approach. Thus, it is difficult to infer that the group differences observed were attributable solely to type of instruction. Furthermore, these across-classroom comparisons failed to examine the degree to which each approach relates to children‟s learning and development when both approaches are utilized within the same classroom.

Given that many early education classrooms today tend to use a mixed-method approach, research is needed that identifies how each educational approach promotes the development of specific skills within the same classroom, rather than across classrooms, so that teachers can utilize the appropriate approach when targeting specific skills.

In addition to the issues about comparability of classrooms, there are shortcomings in the previous research on free play and guided play. First, existing studies that examine which type of play is better for learning have failed to detail how free and guided play differ from one another. Second, in prior research comparing child-centered and direct instruction approaches, free play and guided play are grouped together as “play” or

the child-centered approach, rather than being considered separately. Thus, although free play and guided play have been compared to each other, the relations between these two types of play and children‟s learning and development have never been examined in parallel to the direct instruction approach, except when considered jointly as the child-centered approach. Accordingly, research is needed to explore how free play and guided play differ from one another and to examine how these different types of play relate to children‟s learning and skill development within mixed-method classrooms.

The primary goal of the present dissertation was to conduct research on and to provide empirically based suggestions for early childhood policy and practice regarding the use of free play, guided play, and direct instruction to maximize children‟s learning and development and improve early education instruction for at-risk children. Prior to examining the degree to which the child-centered and direct instruction approaches facilitate children‟s learning, research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that children have in free play and guided play within the child-centered approach. Although theory and research suggest that teacher presence, or guided play, is more productive for learning than free play (Barnett, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2009; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978), we lack clarity regarding the similarities and differences between these contexts. Such research is needed to determine whether free play and guided play lead to similar or different experiences with activities and peers.

It is important to examine similarities and differences in these contexts because various playful learning experiences may differentially lead to learning-related benefits. That is, certain activities or peer interactions lead to more positive, less

positive, or simply different outcomes. For example, play with blocks is thought to promote mathmatics-related skills while play with books is thought to promote literacy-related skills (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Dodge et al., 2002; Verdine, Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Newcombe, 2014). Thus, if it were discovered that children engage with blocks more during free play, teachers may use free play when they want to target mathematics skills. Blocks are not inherently better than books, but rather more beneficial for targeting specific math-related skills.Some experiences, however, are inherently better than others. For example, studies show that high quality engagement with activities (e.g., constructive versus passive) and peers (e.g., social versus parallel play) is related to positive cognitive and social development (Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Dunn, 1993). Furthermore, research suggests that greater diversity in children‟s play with activities and peers is more beneficial for learning than a narrow range of experiences with activities and peers (DiDonato, Martin, Hessler, Amazeen, Hanish, & Fabes, 2012). Thus, identifying the playful learning context, free play or guided play, in which children experience higher quality and greater diversity in play with activities and peers is just as important as identifying the specific activity or peer experiences that are likely to occur within free and guided play. By gaining a deeper understanding of free play and guided play, we could provide teachers with information for how to capitalize on the most beneficial experiences in each context.

The child centered and direct instruction approaches may influence the various dimensions of school readiness, including academic, affective, and social readiness, in different ways. Accordingly, it is important to understand the degree to which at-risk children develop various skills through child-centered contexts (free play and/or guided play) and through direct instruction.

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

There is very little empirical research examining free play and guided play. Of that research, no studies have been conducted in which children‟s experiences during free play and guided play have been observed directly. The few research studies that have examined free and guided play were experimental studies that compared an intervention classroom in which teachers were instructed about how to guide children‟s play to a control classroom (in which there may be some levels of guided play, but teachers were not given any instruction; e.g., Tools of the Mind; Bodrova& Leong, 2009). These studies show that when teachers were instructed about how to guide children‟s play, children fare better than their peers in classrooms in which teachers were given no instruction. These studies fail to show, however, the naturally occurring differences in free play and guided play.

The goal of the current research was to use observational data to gain a clear understanding of the similarities and differences between free play and guided play. It is important to first define free play and guided play. The majority of observational research examining natural variability during children‟s play examines teacher presence or a lack of teacher presence (Kontos & Keyes, 1999; Oettingen, 1985; Serbin, Connor & Citron, 1981; Tomes, 1995). Using this framework as a guide, the following definitions were used for the purpose of this study: free play was defined as any time children were engaged in play that occurred away from the teacher and did not include any teacher-child interactions; guided play was defined as play that occurred within a 5-foot radius of the teacher or during direct teacher-child interactions.

2.4.4 Challenges encountered in the use of play

All children have physical, social and emotional and cognitive needs. Physical needs include food, clothing, shelter and medical care. Basic social and emotional needs include a consistent and predictable relationship with an attentive and caring adult who has high social and moral expectations, strong peer acceptance and freedom from exploitation and discrimination in their communities (Weissbourd, 1996 as cited in White & Isenberg (2003). Minimal cognitive needs include the ability to communicate thoughts and feelings, to engage in constructive problem solving and to experience success both at school and in the community (Case, Griffin & Kelly, 2001; Weissbourd, 1996 as cited in White & Isenberg).

Children who grew up with their basic physical and material needs met are likely to trust themselves and their community, possess a zest for life, and build on inner resourcefulness to participate in society regardless of the obstacles they face. They are

also more likely to develop a sense of confidence and competence in family, school and community endeavours as a result of repeated successful coping experiences (White & Isenberg, 2003). On the other hand, children who grow up without having basic needs met are at a clear disadvantage for a healthy start in life (White & Isenberg, 2003). Many of these children exhibit particular behavioural and developmental characteristics such as developmental disabilities medical fragility, poor school performance), making them vulnerable to being able to function effectively as learners (White & Isenberg, 2003).

In poor countries, a large share of the population is excluded from the education system already at an early age and well before completion of the compulsory schooling cycle. Exclusion from the school system encompasses in varying combinations failure to enrol, late entry, intermittent and irregular attendance, high retention rates and eventually early drop out (UNESCO, 2005). Although there is worldwide increase in pre-school education, access and quality in developing countries cannot be equalled to the developed nations. This is evident with statistics from the Global Partnership for Education (2012) showing that Sub-Saharan Africa showed the lowest gross enrolment ratios of 18th in 2009 where children from privileged backgrounds were four times more likely to receive pre-primary education than poor children.

According to the GPE (2012), the principal challenge to ECEC programmes is an effective and well-targeted intervention, lack of adequate funding, limited local and national administration capacity and low social demand for quality ECCE Services. Inadequate ECCE services, the low quality or lack of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children

coupled with the lack of qualified teachers are some of the challenges bedevilling pre-school education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The provision and access to quality early childhood Education Services faces myriad of challenges worldwide. In Central and Eastern European Countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS), only a fraction of children between ages three and six years old in urban areas have access to ECEC services especially in the poorest countries (Global Partnership for Education, 2012). According to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2009, 46% of the world‟s children were enrolled in pre-school education as compared to 33% in 1999. Although there is worldwide increase in pre-school education, access and quality in developing countries cannot be equalled to the developed nations. This is evident with statistics from the GPE showing that Sub-Saharan Africa had the lowest gross enrolment ratios of 18% in 2009. However, children from privileged backgrounds were four times more likely to receive pre-school education than poor children.

A UNESCO (2007) study in Romania noted that the challenges of entry into early childhood facilities were the lack of correct individual documentation like birth certificates, poverty, social and political strife and transportation. Other reasons were the fear of abduction and child trafficking which prevented some families from having the confidence to place their young children within early childhood educational institutions. Parental fears for children‟s welfare and safety in anticipation of prejudice on the part of the staff of institutions and non-Roma pupils and their parents was also a factor that limited access to pre-school. Subsequently, the fears within some families that their children were not competent in the official language of instruction in the early childhood educational setting and the use of buses as part of

How well early childhood professionals meet children‟s essential needs strongly influences how successful they will be as learners and as future citizens (White & Parker, 2003). Giving people a good start at a young age is, therefore, the key role of a Nursery or Pre-school Teacher who plays a vital role in children's social, personal, physical and emotional development. Family characteristics also mediate the effects of care and education programmes on children's development (Bowman, 1993). Family factors associated with children's school readiness are parental aspirations and expectation for achievement, parental strategies for controlling child behavior, maternal teaching style (affective and contingent), linguistic orientation, beliefs about the cases of child success and failure in school, children's home environment (Bowman, 1993).

A range of evidence has indicated that playfulness in children is both an indication of mental well-being and is supported by it. In this literature the two key issues which emerge relate to young children‟s formation of secure emotional attachments and to the role of stress. Arising originally from the seminal work of Bowlby (1953) and Ainsworth et al. (1978), we now have abundant evidence that the formation of secure emotional attachments early in a child‟s life has significant consequences for healthy brain development (Swain, 2007), for emotion regulation and the ability to show empathy, form emotional relationships and friendships with others (Feldman, 2007), for emotional resilience (Schore, 2001) and for playfulness (Panksepp, 2001). Of particular importance in this area is the crucial role of playfulness in children‟s formation and maintenance of friendships, which are, in turn, fundamentally important in supporting healthy social and emotional development (Panksepp, 2007).

The role of secure emotional attachments in supporting children‟s ability to cope with anxiety and stress is also of particular significance. However, here the picture is quite complex, as a certain level of stress or unpredictability in the environment appears to support the development of children‟s resilience and playfulness, whereas high levels of stress clearly lead to a reduction in the amount of play in which children engage (Burghardt, 2005). The US National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005) make the distinction between the „positive stress‟ which arises from children living in emotionally supportive and stimulating environments containing elements of uncertainty, which supports playfulness and the development of resilience, and „toxic stress‟, (p.15) where children are unsupported and subjected to severely and consistently stressful situations.

Lester and Russell (2010) have provided a powerful analysis of the „environmental stressors‟ experienced by children across the world. From this analysis it is clear that some of the most vulnerable groups of children are those living in cities and urbanised contexts. Children living in poverty in these environments are often malnourished, a situation which, since playfulness requires metabolic energy (Burghardt, 2005), is often associated with low levels of play. As a consequence of the stress on their parents, they are also less likely to receive sensitive parenting leading to secure attachments. A number of studies in the UK, for example, have linked poverty, parental stress, inadequate parenting and children‟s mental health problems (Russell, 2008). Meltzer (2000) estimated that children living in low-income households are nearly three times as likely to suffer mental health problems.

Living in urban environments can also have negative effects on the playfulness of children who are fortunate to live in supportive households, but whose parents, carers and teachers, perceiving a range of environmental hazards and dangers, become overly risk-averse and over-protect and over-supervise their children (Veitch, 2006). This leads us into the second category of factors which can support or inhibit children‟s play, which relate to opportunities provided for play. A study by Shier (2008) clearly illustrates this issue. This compared opportunities for play and attitudes to safety while playing outdoors between children living in Nicaragua and the UK. While the children in Nicaragua enjoyed a high level of independent mobility and developed self-reliance attitudes towards safety while swimming in lakes, climbing trees etc., the children in the UK were much more closely supervised and did not generally experience these opportunities.

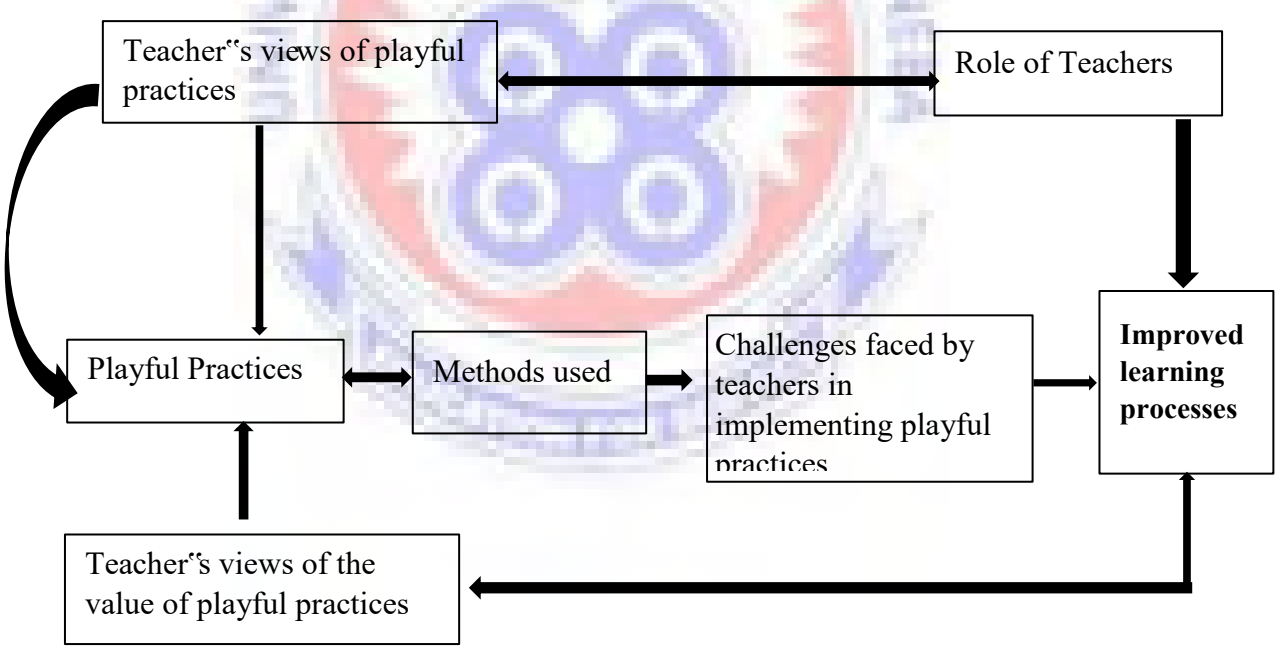
This problem of parental over-supervision and over-scheduling of children has arisen quite recently, just in the last few decades. However, according to a survey of parental attitudes in sixteen countries (Singer, 2009) this is now a worldwide issue. Mothers in this survey, from countries across Europe and in four other continents, reported fears about allowing their children to play outside related to increases in traffic, crime, harassment and violence, possible abduction, dirt and germs, and many more similar issues. A report written for the UK National Trust (Moss, 2012) cites evidence that the area where children are allowed to range unsupervised around their homes has shrunk by 90% since the 1970s. At the same time, in the UK and many other countries, rates of obesity, self-harm and mental health disorders diagnosed in children have climbed significantly. This is attributed to a now well recognised phenomenon of „nature deficit disorder“ (Louv, 2005) arising from children having very limited access to the outdoors and natural environments.

Even the most playfully inclined children will not be able to play, sufficiently for them to reap the benefits in terms of their learning and development, if they are not given the time, the space and the independence to develop their own spontaneous and self-initiated play activities. Lester and Russell (2010) provide a very useful review of the now quite extensive literature studying children‟s use of urban and rural spaces for playful purposes. What emerges from this is that, in their play, children appropriate different spaces and features within their environment which are quite unpredictable by adults, and that the richest play spaces are mostly natural and unplanned. Many urban playgrounds, designed by adults, are often too neat and tidy, and essentially often rather barren as regards playful opportunities. The most successful urban play environments are „adventure playgrounds‟ which are set up so that children can adapt them and build their own spaces, using a range of natural and man-made building materials (Bartlett, 2002).

Having said all this, of course, much very productive playful activity can and does take place in the home and (although unfortunately to a markedly declining degree in a number of European countries) in early care and educational settings and schools. Three key factors emerge from the research concerning the support for play in these environments. These relate to the level of stimulation, the quality of interactions with adults, and the degree of independence or autonomy offered to the children concerning their play. As regards stimulation, within indoor environments, this is mostly related to the provision of play materials and toys which support the five types of play identified earlier for children. It has been established for some time, through a number of studies, that access to a variety of materials and toys is related to children‟s cognitive development (Bradley, 1985).

Within this general position it is well established that materials and toys support play most effectively when they are open and flexible and provide children with a wealth of opportunities for creativity, for social interaction with their peers and adults, for authorship and for deep engagement (Gauntlett, 2010). However, beyond this there is currently a paucity of research as to the qualities of specific types of materials and toys, related to the different types of play, which most effectively support playfulness, learning and development. Recent studies by Howard and colleagues,(2003) for example, have shown that a key factor in children engaging with and learning most effectively from activities with toys and other materials, is that they perceive the situation to be playful (Howard, 2002; McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley, 2011).

2.5 Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher"s construction, (2018)

Figure 1: Play Activities in the Early Childhood Environment

Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic description of play in the development of children in the early childhood context. The diagram depicts that, children"s views of playful activities and teacher"s views of the value of playful activities influence the methods

of play in the school and the methodology and pedagogy adopted by the teacher in enforcing children‟s play. These efforts of the teachers are most at times hindered or challenged by some social and environmental factors that impede the process of play and its effectiveness. With the devoted and professional role of the teacher, there is an assured positive improved learning outcome of playful activities in the school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This section covered the methodology used in the study. The chapter was structured around the research design, study area, population of the study, sampling size and sampling strategy, instrumentation, validity of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, and the ethical considerations of the Study.

3.1 Research Design

Cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study in making a quantitative inquiry to examine the play activities of early learners in public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A cross-sectional survey is one that produces a „snapshot" of a population at a particular point in time. The epitome of the cross-sectional study is a national census in which a representative sample of the population consisting of individuals of different ages, different occupations, different educational and income levels, and residing in different parts of the country, is interviewed on the same day (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). More typically in education, cross-sectional studies involve indirect measures of the nature and rate of changes in the physical and intellectual development of samples of children drawn from representative age levels. The single „snapshot" of the cross-sectional study provides researchers with data for either a retrospective or a prospective enquiry (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). A cross-sectional study can examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or activities. Attitudes, beliefs, and opinions are ways in which individuals think about issues, whereas activities are their actual behaviours (Creswell, 2012).

According to Hall (2011) cross-sectional surveys can be conducted using any mode of data collection, including telephone interviews in which landline telephones are called, telephone interviews in which cell phones are called, face-to-face interviews, mailed questionnaires, other self-administered questionnaires, electronic mail, Web data collection, or a mixture of data collection modes. A variety of sampling frames can also be used to select potential respondents for cross-sectional surveys: random-digit dialling frames, lists of addresses or (landline) telephone numbers, lists of cell phone numbers, lists of businesses or other establishments, and area probability frames (Hall, 2011). This design has the advantage of measuring current attitudes or activities. It also provides information in a short amount of time, such as the time required for administering the survey and collecting the information (Creswell, 2012).

In the context of this study, the approach helped to quantify data that were collected on the perception of kindergarten teachers on playful activities; the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens; strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play in public kindergartens; as well as identify the challenges encountered in the use of play.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population includes all elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a study (Burns & Grove, 2003). Polit and Hungler (2004) also referred to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population targeted for this study comprised all kindergarten teachers in the public schools in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra Region. The researcher focused on kindergarten teachers because they are relevant for the study and can provide information concerning the perception they have on playful

activities; their role in supporting play activities in public kindergartens; strategies they use to improve play in public kindergartens; as well as the challenges they encounter in the use of play. Data from the Greater Accra Regional Directorate of the GES (2018) showed that, there were 166 KG 1 & 2 teachers in the 42 public kindergarten schools in the Ga-West Municipality (Greater Accra Region Educational Directorate, 2018). Table 2 illustrates the number of kindergarten teachers in each of the public schools in the circuits.

Table 2: Population Distribution

Circuits	Number of Schools	Number of KG Teachers
West	10	42
East	10	40
South	12	38
North	10	46
Total	**42**	**166**

Source: Greater Accra Region Educational Directorate, 2018.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The quality of a piece of research stands or falls not only on the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted (Cohen, et al., 2007). There are 42 public kindergarten schools within the Ablekuma South Metro of the Ga-West Municipality in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. All the forty-two (42) public kindergarten schools were usedfor the study. There were 166kindergarten teachers in the 42 public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro that were used in the study. Therefore, all the 166 kindergarten (KG 1 & 2) teachers were involved in the study. The census sampling procedure was used to involve all the KG 1 & 2 teachers in the study. The census

sampling procedure was adopted due to the limited number of kindergarten teachers in the study area.

3.4 Research Instrument

This study adopted a structured questionnaire for data collection. A questionnaire is a printed self-report form designed to elicit information that can be obtained through the written responses of the subjects. The information obtained through a questionnaire is similar to that obtained from an interview, but the questions tend to have less depth (Burns & Grove 1993). Also, questionnaires could be answered more easily and quickly by participants (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). The researcher chose questionnaire because, the respondents (kindergarten teachers) were literates and therefore could read and respond to the items.

The questionnaire was made up of five sections (A-E) consisting of 44 items. Section A comprised four (4) items (i.e. items 1-4) which focused on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B comprised ten (10) items (i.e. items 5-14) which considered the perception of kindergarten teachers on play activities. Section ten (10) items (i.e. items 15-24) which looked at the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities. Section D consisted of ten (10) items (i.e. items 25-34) which looked at strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play in public kindergartens. Section E comprised ten (10) items (i.e. items 35-44) which considered the challenges encountered in the use of play. In order to ensure easy response of the items by the respondents (teachers), the questionnaire was a four-point scale type with options ranging from: Strongly agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and strongly Disagree (SA) =1 respectively.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Instrument

Validity refers to the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores entailed by use of tests. The validity of an instrument is the extent to which it does measure what it is supposed to measure. The instrument was given to an expert (my supervisor) in the Department of Early Childhood to scrutinize and ensure that the questionnaire met face, content and construct validity.

The term reliability points to the level of internal consistency or stability over time of a research instrument. Therefore, for a research instrument to be reliable, it must be capable of yielding consistent results when used more than once to collect data from two samples that have been drawn randomly from the same population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). In line with this, the questionnaire was pilot tested in three selected kindergartens in the Winneba Township; namely, University Practice School, North and South Campus and Presbyterian Basic School. These schools were selected because they exhibit similar characteristics with the actual schools in the Ablekuma South Metro.

Convenient sampling technique was used to select one (1) kindergarten teacher from each school totalling 3 kindergarten teachers to participate in the pilot test. Clarifications and explanations were given when necessary. The data gathered were analysed and the Cronbach‟s alpha established for each of the items that fall under the four research questions formulated to guide the study.

The questionnaire for the teachers consisted of five (5) sections i.e. sections A, B, C, D & E covering various relevant areas such as demographic information, the perception of kindergarten teachers on playful activities; the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens; strategies used by

kindergarten teachers to improve play in public kindergartens; as well as the challenges encountered in the use of play. The Cronbach`s alpha of .91 was obtained for the teachers‟ questionnaire. The 4 sections cover the following areas: Section B (items nr. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; Cronbach`s alpha 0.91) included the perception of kindergarten teachers on play activities. Section C (Items Nr. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; Cronbach`s alpha 0.83) consisted of the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens. Section D (items nr. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34; Cronbach`s alpha 0.86) included strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve play in public kindergartens. Section E (Items Nr. 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44; Cronbach`s alpha 0.86) consisted of the challenges encountered in the use of play.

According to De Vellis (1991), such a reliability coefficient (.91 for the teachers‟ questionnaire) is said to be respectable. Therefore, the instrument was considered reliable and appropriate to collect the relevant data to answer the hypotheses posed. Also Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 17), posited that “For research purposes a useful rule of thumb is that reliability should be at .70 and preferably higher”. With this, the instrument used in this study could be said to be of good quality capable of collecting useful data for the study. The queries that came out of the item analyses were catered for. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) version 23. All these actions were taken to ensure that the instrument was capable of collecting quality and useful data for the study.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood Education which was used to obtain permission from the appropriate authorities of the selected kindergartens to enable him conduct the study. The instruments were self administered in order to ensure a high return rate. The consent of the teachers was sought for before administration of the questionnaire to the sampled respondents. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents by the researcher. The data collection exercise was conducted within a period of two (2) weeks from November 12, 2018 to November 23, 2018. In order to ensure a high return rate, the researcher ensured that, questionnaire were given out and retrieved on the same day.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

This study sought to examine the play activities of early learners in public kindergarten schools in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. To address the research questions and hypotheses formulated to guide the study, quantitative techniques were employed in the analysis of the data. Specifically, the four research questions were analyzed using frequencies and percentages based on the responses recorded for each of the items on the questionnaire that was given to the respondents. The computation was done with the use of the Statistical Package for Service Solutions version 23. The coding of the items were done in line with the scale provided as follows; Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and strongly Disagree (SA) =1. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were analyzed using independent samples t-test. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were analyzed using ANOVA. These were done with the use of computer software Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS)

version 23. The data were analyzed under four research question and four (4) hypotheses as indicated in chapter one of the study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of the study, an introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Early Childhood Education in the faculty of Educational Studies in theUniversity of Education, Winneba and presented to heads of the Ghana Education Service local directorate and the head teachers of the various schools sampled.

Individual should be provided with sufficient information about the research, in a format that is comprehensible to them, and make a voluntary decision to participate in a research study - informed consent (Creswell, 2012). An informed consent form detailing the researcher‟s background, contact information, purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and right to withdraw in the study was given to participants to read. Upon agreement to participate in the study, participants were asked to sign the forms. They were also informed that they could choose not to answer questions they feel uncomfortable with. Participants were made to understand that participation in the study is voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time without attracting any consequence.

The researcher ensured that participants‟ privacy was respected and ensured their anonymity. Data collected for study was kept confidential and used solely for the purpose indicated. All paper records collected were securely stored under lock and key in locked file cabinets with access to only the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

The purpose of the study was to examine the play activities of early learners in public schools‟ kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. This chapter presents data in an attempt to answer the stated research questions. This chapter is structured into two sections, the first section focuses on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the second section deals with the presentation of data in relation to the research questions.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of teachers sampled for the study. The demographic information of the respondents was based on gender, age, and class. The four-point Likert scale was reduced to a two-point Likert scale. Strongly Agree and Agree were merged to be Agree (A) whilst Strongly Disagree and Disagree were also merged to be Disagree (D). Table 3 shows the gender distribution of the respondents of the study. Majority of the respondents 106(64.6%) were females whilst a minority of the respondents 58(35.4%) were males. The gender disposition of the respondents may influence the general responses to the stated objectives.

Table 3 shows the demographic data of respondents in relation to their gender

Table 3: Gender of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Male	58	35.4
Female	106	64.6
Total	**164**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, 2018

Out of the sample size of 166 kindergarten (KG 1 & 2) teachers, the accessible sample size was 164. This indicates 98.80% return rate. This was due to the fact that two (2) of the kindergarten teachers were not available at the time of data collection due to ill-health.

Table 4 presents the demographic data of the teachers in relation to their age

Table 4: Age Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 years	12	7.3
25-29 years	27	16.5
30-34 years	22	13.4
35-39 years	55	33.5
40-44 years	27	16.5
45-49 years	17	10.4
50-54 years	4	2.4
Total	**164**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, 2018

In table 4 the data show that the majority of the respondents 27(16.5%) were between the ages of 25-29 years and 40-44 years, respectively. The minority of the respondents 4(2.4%) were between the ages of 50-54 years old. The age distribution suggests that

the respondents are quite youthful, and this would influence the general perception of play and it‟s related activities in the classroom.

Table 5 shows the educational/professional level of the respondents sampled for the study.

Table 5: Professional Level

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Cert "A"	14	8.5
Diploma in ECE	65	39.7
Diploma in Basic Education	62	37.8
Degree in ECE	23	14.0
Total	**164**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 5 shows that a majority of the respondents 65(39.7%) were Diploma in Early Childhood Education certificate holders whiles a minority of the respondents 14(8.5%) were certificate "A" holders

4.2 Data Presentation and Discussion

This section presents data gathered from the field in an attempt to achieve the stated research objectives. The analysis was done according to the stated research questions of the study.

Research Question 1: How do kindergarten teachers‟ perceive playful activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb in the greater Accra region? This research question sought to explore the perception of playful activities either as meaningful or not. Data gathered in answer to this research question have been presented in Table 7.

Table 6: Early Childhood Teachers Perception of Play Activities (N=164)

Items	SA		A		SD		D			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
I balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process	48	29.3	82	50.0	12	7.3	22	13.4	2.93	.965
Through play activities I identify how the child may be assisted in learning	14	8.5	96	58.5	32	19.6	22	13.4	2.64	.824
Play activities provides me the opportunity to ascertain the capability of child and the appropriate support	32	19.6	99	60.3	14	8.5	19	11.6	2.87	.854
The use of play in a pre-school is to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning	82	50.0	68	41.5	2	1.2	12	7.3	3.34	.844
During playful activities, I plan activities that reflect the aims and objectives inconformity with the educational goals in the national curriculum.	17	10.4	94	57.3	12	7.3	41	25.0	2.52	.986
I consider children`s play as an educational tool for teaching and learning.	7	4.3	82	50.0	51	31.1	24	14.6	2.44	.797
My concept and perspective of play is to promote the development of motor and cognitive skills	5	3.0	94	57.4	39	23.8	26	15.8	2.46	.802
Through play, I promote the development of social and emotional competencies for children.	41	25.0	87	53.0	2	1.2	34	20.8	2.83	1.039
The use of play helps children to think logically and acquire language skills.	27	16.4	101	61.7	12	7.3	24	14.6	2.78	.892
Children‟s play is joyous moment in the early childhood years setting.	7	4.3	101	61.7	29	17.6	27	16.4	2.54	.819

Source: Field Data, 2018

Mean Ranges: Strongly Disagree (SD)=0.00-1.59; Disagree (D)=1.60-2.59
Agree (A)=2.60-3.59; Strongly Agree (SA) =3.60-4.00
Mean of means = 2.74

From Table 6 the data reveals that, the kindergarten teachers had positive (favourable) perceptions about play activities. With a means of means of 2.74, it can be concluded that, the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to most of the statements posed to them to find out their perception about play activities. The mean of standard deviation of .88 indicated that the respondents differed significantly regarding their agreement to the whole phenomenon. The following conclusions could be drawn for the individual items in Table 6.

The data in Table 6 show that 130(79.3%, M=2.93 SD=.965) agreed that, they balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process. Also, many of the respondents (110, 67.0%, M=2.64, SD= .824) agreed that through play activities they identify how the child may be assisted in learning. Again, the majority of the teachers (131, 79.9%, M= 2.87, SD=854) agreed that play activities provide them the opportunity to ascertain the capability of child and their appropriate support.

Concerning teachers‟ perception of the use of play in pre-school to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning, (150, 91.5%, M=3.34, SD=844) agreed to this item. Respondents (111, 67.7% M= 2.52 SD=.986) agreed that, during playful activities, they plan activities that reflect the aims and objectives in conformity with the educational goals in the national curriculum. Majority of the respondents (89, 54.3%, M=2.44, SD= .797) agreed that they consider children‟s play as an educational tool for teaching and learning. Similarly, the majority of the teachers agreed to the statement; “My concept and perspective of play is to promote the development of motor and cognitive skills”, the majority of the respondents (99, 60.4%, M=2.46 .SD=802) agreed. Many of the respondents (128, 78.0%, M= 2.83,

SD= 1.039) agreed that through play, they promote the development of social and emotional competencies for children. A significant majority of the respondent, (128, 78.0%, M=2.78 SD=.892) agreed that the use of play helps children to think logically and acquire languageskills. To conclude, majority of the respondents (108, 66.0%, M=2.54, SD=.819) agreed that children‟s play is joyous moment in the early childhood years setting. Children develop through play and it is the best way of learning for the future.

From the foregoing analysis, it could be concluded that, the teachers had a positive perception about playful activities in public kindergartens. This is because, they balanced both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process (M = 2.93); and through play activities they identified how the child may be assisted in learning (M = 2.64). Also, the kindergarten teachers perceived the use of play in pre-school as a way to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning (M = 3.34), and play activities provides them the opportunity to ascertain the capability of child and the appropriate support (M = 2.87). Again, they agreed that, the use of play helps children to think logically and acquire language skills (M = 2.78); and it helps develop the social and emotional competencies for children (M = 2.83).

Research Question 2: What is the role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb in the greater Accra region? This research question south to ascertain the designated and specific role of the early childhood teacher in the playful activities engaged in my children. Data gathered in answer to this research question have been presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Role of Early Childhood Teachers in Supporting Play Activities

Items	SA		A		SD		D			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
When am present, children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning?	60	36.6	7	4.3	24	14.6	73	44.5	2.69	.790
Children display less evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working under my supervision	17	10.4	22	13.4	39	23.8	86	52.4	2.88	.912
My role as a teacher is considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play.	80	48.8	58	35.4	14	8.5	12	7.3	3.23	.916
I plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play	70	42.7	82	50.0	12	7.3	0	0.0	3.36	.620
There is a positive relationship between me and the pupils and the degree of control between us.	64	39.0	78	47.6	13	7.9	9	5.5	3.21	.812
My role as a teacher increase stress and anxiety and demotivate the children	17	10.4	3	1.8	39	23.8	105	64.0	3.12	.598
I encourage children to plan their own activities for some of the time and they make considerable social gains.	47	28.7	115	70.1	2	1.2	0	0.0	3.26	.491
I use a combination of Teachers-led and child-led activities to improve play.	80	48.7	58	35.4	19	11.6	7	4.3	3.21	.977
Through my active role in play activities, children reach their full potential	55	33.5	65	39.7	31	18.9	13	7.9	3.02	.888
I sometimes provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering.	27	16.5	104	63.4	12	7.3	21	12.8	2.81	.861

Source: Field Data, 2018

Mean Ranges: Strongly Disagree (SD)=0.00-1.59; Disagree (D)= 1.60-2.59
Agree (A)=2.60-3.59; Strongly Agree (SA) =3.60-4.00 Mean of means = 3.08

In Table 7 the data reveals that, the kindergarten teachers played several roles in supporting play activities. With a mean of means of 3.08, it can be concluded that, the majority of the respondents agreed to most of the statements posed to them to find out their roles in supporting play activities. The mean of standard deviation of .79 indicated that, the respondents differed significantly regarding their agreement to the whole phenomenon. The following individual items in Table 7 attest to this fact.

The data reveal that a majority of the respondents (97, 59.1%, M=2.69, SD= .790) diagreed to the statement that when they are present, children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning.When the teachers were asked whether children display less evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working under their supervision, a majority of the respondents (125, 76.2%, M=2.88, SD=.912) disagreed. Also, many of the respondents (138, 84.2%,M=3.23, SD= .916) agreed to the notion that their role as a teacher is considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play.Concerning the teachers planning an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play, most of the respondents (152, 92.7%, M=3.36, SD=.620) agreed to this assertion.

Many of the respondents (142, 86.6%, M=3.21, SD= .812) agreed that there is a positive relationship between them and the pupils and the degree of control between them. In addition, the majority of the respondents (144, 87.8%, M=3.12 SD=.598) disagreed that their role as a teacher increase stress and anxiety and demotivate the children. With regard to encouraging children to plan their own activities for some of the time and make considerable social gains, most of the respondents (162, 98.8, M= 3.26 SD=.491) agreed to the statement. One hundred and thirty-eight of the

respondents, representing (84.1%, M=.21 SD=.977) agreed that they use a combination of teachers-led and child-led activities to improve play. Concerning the teachers active role in play activities which enables children reach their full potential, (120, 73.2%, M=3.02, SD= .888) agreed to this statement. Finally, a majority of the respondents (131, 79.9%, M=2.81 SD=.861) agreed that sometimes they provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that, the teachers played several roles in supporting play activities in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. This is because, they agreed to the notion that their role as teachers are considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play (M = 3.23). Also, they plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play (M = 3.36). Again, the teachers agreed that, encouraging children to plan their own activities for some of the time enabled them to make considerable social gains (M = 3.26).

Research Question 3: What strategies are used by kindergarten teachers to improve play in public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro suburb in the greater Accra region? This research question was intended to reveal methods that could be adopted to improve the use of playful activities in the classroom. Data gathered on it have been presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Strategies used by Early Childhood Teachers to Improve Playful Activities

Items	SA		A		SD		D			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
I use a set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place.	12	7.3	89	54.3	41	25.0	22	13.4	2.55	.818
I mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment	10	6.1	118	72.0	12	7.3	24	14.6	2.67	.810
I use the direct instruction approach in teaching through play	36	22.0	104	63.4	19	11.6	5	3.0	3.04	.695
I use the child-centered approach in which learning is play-based and child-directed	60	36.7	55	33.5	34	20.7	15	9.1	2.99	.959
I promote learning through a mix of direct instruction and play.	63	38.4	70	42.7	19	11.6	12	7.3	3.13	.875
I inculcate teaching methods that enable children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur	75	45.7	65	39.7	2	1.2	22	13.4	3.19	.978
I believe that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice	63	38.4	68	41.5	12	7.3	21	12.8	3.03	1.011
I carefully sequence the learning process with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring pupils‟ progress,	39	23.8	84	51.2	17	10.4	24	14.6	2.86	.940
The child-centered approach to early childhood education views learning as child-directed rather than teacher-directed and I enforce that.	58	35.4	60	36.6	22	13.4	24	14.6	2.92	1.036
I believe both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children‟s learning and development.	46	28.0	87	53.1	14	8.5	17	10.4	2.98	.888

Source: Field Data, 2018

Mean Ranges: Strongly Disagree (SD)=0.00-1.59; Disagree (D)= 1.60-2.59

Agree (A)=2.60-3.59; Strongly Agree (SA) =3.60-4.00

Data in Table 8 show that, the kindergarten teachers mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment. With a means of means of 2.94, it can be concluded that, the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to most of the statements posed to them to find out the strategies they use to improve play activities. The mean of standard deviation of .90 indicated that, the respondents differed significantly regarding their agreement to the whole phenomenon. The following conclusions could be drawn for the individual items in Table 8.

From Table 8 show the data show that a majority of the respondents (101, 61.6%, M=2.55, SD=.818) agreed that they use a set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place. One hundred and twenty-eight of the respondents, representing (78.1%, M=3.04 SD=.695) of the respondents agreed that they mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment. Concerning the use of direct instruction approach in teaching through play, (140, 85.4%, M= 3.04, SD=.695) agreed. Majority of the respondents (115, 70.2%, M=3.04, SD=.695) agreed that they use the child-centered approach in which learning is play-based and child-directed.

Most of the respondents (133, 81.1%, M=3.13 SD=.875) agreed that they promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play. Also, One hundred and forty of the respondents representing (85.4%, M=3.19, SD=.978) agreed that they inculcate teaching methods that enable children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur. Many of the respondents (131, 79.9%, M=3.03, SD=1.011) again agreed that they believed that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice. A majority of the respondents (123, 75.0%,

M=2.86, SD= .940) agreed that they carefully sequence the learning process with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring pupils progress. Concerning child-centered approach to early childhood education viewing learning as child-directed rather than teacher-directed, a majority of the respondents (118, 72.0%, M=2.92, SD=1.036) agreed to the statement. Finally, a majority of the respondents (133, 81.1%, M=2.98. SD= 888) agreed to the statement that they believe both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children‟s learning and development.

It was evident from the data that the teachers mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment. This is because, they agreed that, they use the direct instruction approach in teaching through play (M = 3.04). Also, the teachers promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play because they use both the child-centered approach and direct instruction approaches (M = 3.13). Again, they inculcate teaching methods that enables children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur (M = 3.19).

Research Question 4: What challenges encountered in the use of play in public kindergartens in Ablekuma South Metro suburb in the greater Accra region? This research question was to identify the various challenges impeding the implementation of playful activities in the classroom. Data gathered in answer to this research question have been presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Challenges Encountered in the use of Play *(N=164)*

Items	SA		A		SD		D			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
The principal challenge to playful activities is a lack effective and well-targeted intervention.	10	6.1	97	59.1	12	7.3	45	27.5	2.39	.970
Lack of adequate funding hinder children‟s playful activities	7	4.3	104	63.4	39	23.8	14	8.5	2.63	.703
Limited local and national administration capacity hinders adequate playful activities of children	10	6.1	109	66.5	14	8.5	31	18.9	2.58	.860
Low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play.	24	14.6	70	42.7	29	17.7	41	25.0	2.50	1.020
The low quality or lack of infrastructure poses as a challenge to children‟s playful activities	41	25.0	53	32.3	58	35.4	12	7.3	2.74	.921
Inadequate teaching and learning materials hinder children‟s playful activities.	39	23.8	87	53.1	14	8.5	24	14.6	2.87	.936
Poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children hinders children playful activities	65	39.6	58	35.4	14	8.5	27	16.5	2.97	1.074
Lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities poses a challenge to children‟s playful activities	53	32.3	89	54.3	14	8.5	8	4.9	3.15	.761
Lack of access to quality early childhood prevents children‟s playful activities	34	20.7	106	64.7	5	3.0	19	11.6	2.95	.841
The financial demands of playful materials pose a challenge to playful activities.	34	20.7	68	41.5	58	35.4	4	2.4	2.77	.820

Source: Field Data, 2018
Mean Ranges: Strongly Disagree (SD)=0.00-1.59; Disagree (D)= 1.60-2.59
Agree (A)=2.60-3.59; Strongly Agree (SA) =3.60-4.00

In Table 9 the data reveals that, the kindergarten teachers encountered a lot of challenges in the use of play. With a mean of means of 2.76, it can be concluded that, the majority of the respondents agreed to most of the statements posed to them to find out challenges they encountered in the use of play. The mean of standard deviation of .89 indicated that, the respondents differed significantly regarding their agreement to the whole phenomenon. The following individual items in Table 9 attest to this fact.

The data show that a majority of the respondents (107, 65.2%, M=2.39, SD .970) perceived the principal challenge to playful activities as an effective and well-targeted intervention. When asked whether lack of adequate funding hinders children‟s playful activities (111, 67.7%, M=2.63, SD=703) of the respondents agreed that it was a challenge. Concerning limited local and national administration capacity hindering adequate play activities of the children, a majority of the respondents (119, 72.6%, M= 2.58, SD= .860) agreed. The data reveals further that low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play, was a challenge, (94, 57.3%, M=2.50, SD=1.020) agreed to this notion. Ninety-fourof the respondents (57.3%, M=2.74, SD=.921) agreed that low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play. Most of the respondents (126, 76.9%, M= 2.87, SD=.936) agreed that inadequate teaching and learning materials hinders children‟s playful activities.

In connection with poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children hinders their playful activities, majority of the respondents (123, 75.0%, M=2.97, SD=1.074) agreed to this statement. Concerning lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities poses a challenge to children‟s playful activities, (142, 86.6%, M=3.15, SD=.761) forming the majority agreed with this statement. Lack of access to

quality early childhood prevent children‟s playful activities was also perceived as a challenge with (140, 85.4%, M=2.95 SD=.841) agreed to that statement. Finally, the financial demands of playful materials as a challenge to playful activities was agreed upon by a majority of the respondents (102, 62.2%, M=2.77, SD=.820).

From the foregoing and analysis, it can be concluded that, the predominant challenges facing the implementation of playful activities included: poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children hinders their playful activities (M = 2.97); lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities poses a challenge to children‟s playful activities (M = 3.15) as well as lack of access to quality early childhood prevent children‟s playful activities (M = 2.95).

4.3 Analyses of Hypotheses

Gender and methods used by early childhood teachers to improve playful activities

Several studies have suggested that, strategies used by early childhood teachers are key towards enhancing learning among children. However, little is known with regards to both male and female teachers concerning whether or not there are differences in the strategies they use in promoting learning among pupils. Therefore, this research hypothesis sought to probe further to unearth, answer this question, and add to literature. This research hypothesis sought to find out whether or not there was a statistically significant difference in strategies used by female and male kindergarten teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra Region. Independent sample T-test was used in the analysis. Findings from the study are presented in Table 10.

The data in Table 10 shows Independent Samples T-test on the Strategies used by Early Childhood Teachers to Improve Playful Activities.

Table 10: Independent Samples T-test on the Strategies used by Early Childhood Teachers to Improve Playful Activities

Gender	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-value	p-value
Strategies used by Early Childhood Teachers	Male	58	31.00	2.96	129.72	6.20	0.00
	Female	106	28.48	3.97			

Source: Field Data, 2018 significant at p=0.05 (2-tailed)

From Table 10, the data show that the male teachers had a mean score of (*M=31.00; SD=2.96*) while the female teachers had a mean score of *(M=28.48; SD=3.97*). This shows that the male teachers used more strategies to improve playful activities compared with that of female teachers. This implies that, concerning the use of strategies to improve playful activities among children, the male teachers were doing better than that of the female teachers. Again, the standard deviation (*SD=3.97*) of the female teachers indicates that the use of strategies to improve playful activities of individual female teachers varied more than that of the male teachers (*SD=2.96*). However, when the means scores of the two groups were tested using the Independent Samples T-Test at 5% significant level, two-tailed, the results revealed a statistically significant difference between the strategies used to improve playful activities of male and female early childhood teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro (*t(129.72)=6.20, p = 0.000*). Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no statistically significant difference in strategies used by female and male kindergarten teachers is rejected.

Gender and Challenges Faced in Using Play

This research hypothesis sought to find out whether or not there was a statistically significant difference in using play by male and female kindergarten teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra Region. The Independent SampleS T-test was used in the analysis. Findings from the study are presented in Table 12.

The data in Table 11 shows Independent Samples T-test on the Challenges Faced in Using Play by Male and Female Kindergarten Teachers

Table 11: Independent Samples T-test on the Challenges Faced in Using Play by Male and Female Kindergarten Teachers

Gender	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-value	p-value
Challenges faced by teachers in using play	Male	58	30.48	3.79			
	Female	106	26.01	3.64	162	9.99	0.00

Source: Field Data, 2018 ** significant at p=0.05 (2-tailed)

From Table 11, the data show that the male teachers had a mean score of (*M=30.48; SD=3.79*) while the female teachers had a mean score of *(M=26.01; SD=3.64*). This shows that the male teachers encountered more challenges in using play compared with that of female teachers. This implies that, the male teachers faced more difficulties in the use of play than the female teachers. Again, the standard deviation (*SD=3.79*) of the male teachers indicates that the challenges the male teachers encountered in the use of play varied more than that of the female teachers (*SD=3.64*). However, when the means scores of the two groups were tested using the Independent Samples T-test at 5% significant level, two-tailed, the results reveal a statistically significant difference in the challenges faced in using play by male and female kindergarten teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro (*t(162)=9.99, p = 0.00*).

Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no statistically significant difference in challenges faced in using play by male and female kindergarten teachers is rejected.

Years of teaching experience and strategies used by teachers

This research hypothesis sought to find out whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the strategies used by kindergarten teachers and their teaching experience. The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in the analysis. The ANOVA is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups. With regards to this study, there were six independent groups regarding years of teaching experience such as less than 1 year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21 years and above. Therefore, the means of these independent groups were compared in order to find out whether any differences existed between these independent groups on the years of teaching experience of the kindergarten teachers and the strategies they adopted. The results are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics of Years of Teaching Experience and Strategies Used by Teachers

Teaching Experience (yrs)	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Less than 1 year	31	26.55	4.49	.600
1-5 years	31	26.55	4.19	.528
6-10 years	30	29.10	2.71	.379
11-15 years	22	29.79	2.62	.425
16-20 years	24	30.22	2.78	.413
21 years and above	26	32.45	2.57	.375
Total	**164**	**29.36**	**3.84**	**.222**

Source: Field Data, 2018

From the data in Table 12 it was found that the respondents with less than 1 year teaching experience had a mean score of (M=26.55; SD=4.49; n=31), 1-5 years had a meanscore of (M=26.55; SD=4.19; n=31), 6-10 years had a mean score of (M= 29.10; SD=2.71; n=30), 11-15 years had a mean score of (M= 29.79; SD= 2.62; n=22), 16-20 years had a means score of (M=30.22; SD=2.78; n=24)and 21 years and above had a mean score of (M=32.45; SD=2.57; n=26). From the statistics of the years of teaching experience of the teachers, the respondents who have 21 years and above years of teaching experience had the highest mean score regarding strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve playful activities, followed by 16-20 years, 11-15 years, 6-10 years, 1-5 years and less than 1 year.

From the preliminary analysis, the Levene‟s test is used to ascertain whether the variance in the scores is the same for each of the years of teaching experiences of the teachers. From the analysis, the Significance value (Sig) for Levene‟ test is 0.000 which is lesser than the alpha or critical value of 0.05. This implies that the assumption of homogeneity has been violated for this sample [$F(5, 159)= 16.111$, $p=$ .0.000 at the .05 alpha level. Table 13 shows whether the overall F ratio for the one-way ANOVA is significant.

Table 13: Summary of One-way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	947.793	5	189.559	16.111	.000
Within Groups	3459.044	159	11.765		
Total	**4406.837**	**164**			

Source: Field Data, 2018

It can be noted that the F ratio (16.111) is significant (p =.000) at the .05 alpha level. This implies that there is a statistically significant difference among the mean scores on the years of teaching experience of the teachers regarding strategies used by kindergarten teachers to improve playful activities. Therefore, the study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference at the $p < .005$ level in the years of teaching experience of teachers regarding strategies they used to improve playful activities [$F (5, 159) = 16.111$, $p = 0.000$]. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant difference in the strategies used by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experience is rejected.

Years of teaching experience and challenges faced by kindergarten teachers

This research hypothesis sought to find out whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers and their teaching experience. The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in the analysis. The ANOVA is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups. With regards to this study, there were six independent groups regarding years of teaching experience such as less than 1 year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21 years and above. Therefore, the means of these independent groups were compared in order to find out whether any differences existed between these independent groups on the years of teaching experience of the kindergarten teachers and the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers. Results are illustrated in Table 14.

Table 14: Descriptive Statistics of Years of Teaching Experience and Challenges Faced by Kindergarten Teachers

Teaching Experience (yrs)	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Less than 1 year	31	30.79	2.45	.328
1-5 years	31	30.79	3.53	.445
6-10 years	30	27.41	4.04	.565
11-15 years	22	27.18	4.27	.692
16-20 years	24	24.93	4.58	.683
21 years and above	26	25.74	4.25	.619
Total	**164**	**27.56**	**4.26**	**.246**

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 14 gives information about the years of teaching experience and the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra Region. It was found that the respondents with less than 1 year teaching experience had a mean score of (M=30.79; SD=2.45; n=31), 1-5 years had a mean score of (M=28.25; SD=3.53; n=31), 6-10 years had a mean score of (M= 27.41; SD=4.04; n=30), 11-15 years had a mean score of (M= 27.18; SD= 4.27; n=22), 16-20 years had a means score of (M=24.93; SD=4.58; n=24)and 21 years and above had a mean score of (M=25.74; SD=4.25; n=26). From the statistics of the years of teaching experience of the teachers, the respondents who had attained less than 1 year of teaching experience had the highest mean score regarding challenges they faced in the use of play to improve playful activities. This means that, the kindergarten teachers who had taught for less than 1 year encountered most challenges in the use of play followed by 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21 years and above.

From the preliminary analysis, the Levene‟s test is used to ascertain whether the variance in the scores is the same for each of the years of teaching experiences of the teachers, from the analysis, the Significance value (Sig) for Levene‟ test is 0.000

which is lesser than the alpha or critical value of 0.05. This implies that the assumption of homogeneity has been violated for this sample [$F(5, 158)= 14.688$, $p=$ .0.000 at the .05 alpha level. Table 15 shows whether the overall F ratio for the one-way ANOVA is significant.

Table 15: Summary of One-way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1084.872	5	216.974	14.688	.000
Within Groups	4343.165	158	14.773		
Total	**5428.037**	**163**			

Source: Field Data, 2018

It can be noted that the F ratio (14.688) is significant (p =.000) at the .05 alpha level. This implies that there is a statistically significant difference among the mean scores on the years of teaching experience of the teachers regarding challenges kindergarten teachers faced in using play to improve playful activities. Therefore, the study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference at the $p < .005$ level in the years of teaching experience of teachers regarding challenges kindergarten teachers encountered in the use of play to improve playful activities [$F (5, 158) = 14.688$, $p = 0.000$]. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant difference in the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers based on their teaching experience is rejected.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

Teachers' perceptions about playful activities in public kindergartens

This section provides a description of early childhood teacher‟s perception of playful activities. The majority of the teachers agreed that, they balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process. This finding resonates with several researches that have confirmed that pre-school practitioners‟ balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process (Babić & Ironic, 2004; Davis, 1997). Also, many of the respondents agreed that through play activities they identify how the child may be assisted in learning. This involves interactions between the child and the practitioner during the process of teaching and learning. It is during such interactions that the practitioner identifies how the child may be assisted in learning and what the child is capable of doing with appropriate support (Einarsdóttir, 1998). Again, the majority of the teachers agreed that play activities provide them the opportunity to ascertain the capability of child and their appropriate support.

Concerning teachers‟ perception of the use of play in pre-school to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning, the majority of the respondents agreed to this item. This finding is in line with that of Hyvonen (2011), who asserted that, the use of play in a pre-school is to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning. Also, respondents agreed that, during playful activities, they plan activities that reflect the aims and objectives in conformity with the educational goals in the national curriculum. Majority of the respondents agreed that they consider children‟s play as an educational tool for teaching and learning. Similarly, the majority of the teachers agreed to the statement; “My concept and perspective of play is to promote the development of motor and

cognitive skills". This finding affirms that of the Ministry of Education Science and Sports (2007) that, when children play, the domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) are enhanced. How can these be possible? Practitioners` perception of children‟s play and learning is a contributory factor for these developments. This transcends through the planned learning activities and appropriate teaching strategies used by the teachers. Reasoning, problem solving, classification, comparing, generalization of concepts is all derived through the play and learning process and these are made possible by teacher‟s guidance (Ministry of Education Science & Sports, 2007).

Many of the respondents agreed that through play, they promote the development of social and emotional competencies for children. A significant majority of the respondents agree that, the use of play helps children to think logically and acquire language skills. Similarly, Bae (2010) also agreed that in the early years‟ settings, practitioners must be attentive, listen to and attempt to interpret children`s body language and reactions, and must be observant in relation to their actions and in-actions, aesthetic expressions and eventually their verbal communications. To conclude, majority of the respondents agree that children‟s play is joyous moment in the early childhood years setting. Children develop through play and it is the best way of learning for the future. In the same vein, Marjatta (2002) posited that, the educational pedagogy of children`s play should be based on activities rather than on academic skills. According to Sutton- Smith (1997; as cited in Sandseter, 2009) these play activities provide children with an experience of arousal, excitement, fun, sense of belonging, joy, and light-heartedness. Accordingly, Sutton-Smith (1997) argued that, children‟s play provides experiences and excitements that is pleasurable, which they want to do again. Similarly, children like to be engaged in play activities that is

relevant to them.

The role of kindergarten teachers in supporting play activities

This section sought to ascertain the designated and specific role of the early childhood teacher in the playful activities engaged in their children. The study identified that, the respondents disagreed to the statement that when they are present, children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning. This finding contradicts that of Devereux and Miller (2003) that, when a teacher is present children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning. When the teachers were asked whether children display less evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working under their supervision, a majority of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. In line with this, Whitebread et al., (2007) asserted that, children display more evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working unsupervised.

Also, many of the respondents agreed to the notion that their role as a teacher is considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play. This finding is supported by several scholars who believe that, the role of the teachers in early years‟ education is considered essential in enabling development (Department for Education and Skills, 2007a; Edgington, 2004). Concerning teachers planning an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play, most of the respondents agreed to this assertion. In relation to play in the classroom a „pedagogy of play‟ has been built around this belief which is constructed as how Teachers make provision for play, plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Many of the respondents agreed that there is a positive relationship between them and the pupils and the degree of control between them. In

addition, the majority of the respondents agreed that their role as a teacher increase stress and anxiety and demotivate the children. Research on effective early years practice has generally shown that programmes involving direct instruction or more formal approaches to teaching show limited and short-term gains in children‟s learning, increase stress and anxiety and demotivate children (Burts et al., 1993; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels & Milburn, 1995; Sylva & Nabuco, 1996; Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule & Trew, 2010; Walsh et al., 2006).

With regard to encouraging children to plan their own activities for some of the time to enable them make considerable social gains, most of the respondents agreed to the statement. This finding is further corroborated by that from the longitudinal High/Scope Perry Pre-school project that, when children are encouraged to plan their own activities for some of the time, they make considerable social gains over time compared to direct instruction programmes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Two hundred and fifty respondents agreed that, they use a combination of teachers-led and child-led activities to improve play. This is in line with findings from the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (Siraj- Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002) which show that, effective settings use a combination of Teachers -led and child-led activities, in keeping with a style of framing which is neither strong nor weak. As to whether teachers played active role in playful activities which enables children reach their full potential, the majority of the respondents agreed to this statement. The finding is shared by other scholars who also believe that, the teacher and the school can actively prepare children for moving on to a new situation (Broström, 2007), plan transitional activities (Dunlop & Fabian, 2005; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007), develop buddy programmes (Dockett & Perry, 2001) and establish strong communication between teachers of successive classes or between

pre-school and school, (Margetts, 1999). Finally, a majority of the respondents agreed that sometimes they provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering.

Strategies used by teachers to improve play in public kindergartens

This research question was intended to reveal methods that could be adopted to improve the use of playful activities in the classroom. It was found out that, the majority of the respondents agreed that they use a set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place. Two hundred and thirty two of the respondents agreed that, they mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment. Concerning the use of direct instruction approach in teaching through play, the majority of the respondents agreed to this statement. Majority of the respondents agreed that they use the child-centered approach in which learning is play-based and child-directed. Studies of the child-centered and direct instruction approaches suggest that both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children‟s learning and development (Karnes, Schwedel & Wiliams, 1983; Marcon, 2002; Miller &Bizzell, 1983; Miller, Dyer, Stevenson & White, 1975; Schweinhart, Weikart & Larner, 1986; Stipek & Byler, 2004). For example, considerable support has been provided for the effectiveness of both approaches on children‟s development of academic skills (i.e., literacy and mathematics) (Karnes et al., 1983; Marcon 1993; 1999; 2002; Miller &Bizzell, 1983; Miller et al., 1975; Schweinhart et al., 1986; Stipek& Byler, 2004). Furthermore, the child-centered approach has been positively related to children‟s development across both social (e.g., ability to interact with peers) and affective domains (e.g., school liking/avoidance; Marcon, 2002; Stipek, Feiler, Daniel, & Millburn, 1995; Stipek et al., 1998).

Most of the respondents agreed that they promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play. The finding is supported by Stipek and Byler (2004) that, the majority of early education programs today use a mix of child-centered and direct instruction approaches. In fact, the majority of Head Start programs follow the Creative Curriculum for Preschool, which suggests that "because children have unique learning styles and needs" teachers should utilize both direct instruction and child- centered approaches (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002; p. 173). Two hundred and twenty-eight of the respondents agreed that they inculcate teaching methods that enables children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur. Many of the respondents again agreed that they believed that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice. A majority of the respondents agreed that they carefully sequence the learning process with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring pupils" progress. Concerning child-centered approach to early childhood education viewing learning as child-directed rather than teacher-directed, a majority of the respondents agreed to the statement. Finally, a majority of the respondents agreed to the statement that they believe both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children"s learning and development.

Challenges encountered in the use of play

This section sought to identify the various challenges impeding the implementation of playful activities in the classroom. It was realised that, the majority of the respondents perceived the principal challenge to playful activities as an effective and well-targeted intervention. When asked whether lack of adequate funding hinders children"s playful activities, majority of the respondents agreed that it was a challenge. These findings are in line with that of GPE (2012) that, the principal challenges to ECEC

programmes are an effective and well-targeted intervention and lack of adequate funding. Concerning limited local and national administration capacity hindering adequate playful activities of children, a majority of the respondents agreed. Also, it was found out that, low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play. These findings corroborate that of GPE (2012) that, the principal challenges to ECEC programmes are limited local and national administration capacity and low social demand for quality ECCE Services. All the respondents agreed that low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play. Most of the respondents agreed that inadequate teaching and learning materials hinders children‟s playful activities. According to the GPE (2012), inadequate ECCE services, the low quality or lack of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children coupled with the lack of qualified teachers are some of the challenges bedevilling pre-school education in Sub- Saharan Africa. It has been established for some time, through a number of studies, that access to a variety of materials and toys is related to children‟s cognitive development (Bradley, 1985).

In connection with poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children hinders their playful activities, majority of the respondents agreed to this statement. As to whether lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities poses a challenge to children‟s playful activities, the majority of the respondents agreed to this statement. Finally, the financial demands of playful materials as well as lack of access to quality early childhood prevent children‟s playful activities were also perceived as challenges facing the implementation of playful activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This final chapter comprises a summary of the study, emphasizing on the major findings. It discusses the conclusion, recommendations as well as suggestions for future research.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the play activities of early learners in public schools‟ kindergartens of the Ablekuma South Metro in the Accra Metropolitan assembly. To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. To ascertain how Early Childhood Teachers‟, view playful activities in selected public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra region.
2. To ascertain the role of Early Childhood Teachers in supporting and guiding play activities in selected public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra region.
3. To identify methods used by Early Childhood Teachers to improve play in selected public kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro of the Greater Accra region.
4. To determine the challenges encountered in the use of play in selected publickindergarten in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Greater Accra region.

To achieve this purpose, the cross-sectional survey design was employed. Census sampling procedure was adopted to involve 164 respondents in the study. Questionnaire was used to gather data. Data gathered was analysed using both descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) and inferential (Independent Samples T-test and ANOVA) statistics. The following findings emerged from the study.

5.2 Key Findings

The following findings emerged from the study:

1. It was realized that, the teachers had a positive perception about playful activities in public kindergartens. This is because, the teachers balanced both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process and through play activities they identified how the child may be assisted in learning. Also, the kindergarten teachers perceived the use of play in pre-school as a way to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning, and considered children‟s play as an educational tool for teaching and learning. Again, they agreed that, play promotes the development of motor skills, cognitive skills, as well as social and emotional competencies for children.
2. It was found out that, the teachers played several roles in supporting play activities in public kindergartens. This is because, the teachers agreed to the notion that their role as a teacher is considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play, and teachers used a combination of teachers-led and child-led activities to improve play. Also, teachers agreed that, encouraging children to plan their own activities for some of the time enabled children to make considerable social gains, and teachers played active role in

playful activities which enables children reach their full potential. Again, teachers provided materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering.

3. Also, it was realised that, teachers mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment. They promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play because they use both the child-centered approach and direct instruction approaches. They inculcate teaching methods that enables children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur and believe that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice.
4. It was found that, the predominant challenges facing the implementation of playful activities were related to; lack of effective and well-targeted intervention, lack of adequate funding. Limited local and national administration capacity, low quality or lack of infrastructure, inadequate teaching and learning materials, poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children, lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities and financial demands of playful materials possess a challenge to playful activities.

5.3 Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study:

1. It could be concluded that Early Childhood Teachers perceived playful activities as quite educative and instructionally beneficial to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development of the child in the initial stages of life. If these views are improved and maintained the use of playful activities would be increased.
2. It could be concluded that Early Childhood Teachers considered their role in supporting and guiding play activities as fundamental and significant in determining the quality of children‟s play and development. If these are carefully considered, children‟s play would be more educational.
3. It was further concluded that Early Childhood Teachers use a fusion of child-centered, direct instruction, explicit teaching, repetition, and practice to teach children through constructive playful activities. If teachers improve on their pedagogical methods, children‟s play would significantly improve.
4. The study concluded that the implementation of playful activities was impeded by the lack of funds, trained personnel, time allocation and regard for playful activities. If these findings are abated, there would be a profound increase in the practice of playful activities and the quality of children play.

5.4 Recommendations of the Study

The following recommendations were drawn based on the findings of the study:

1. The Ablekuma South Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and the sampled schools of the study should organise in-service training for teachers on the significance of playful activities to educate them on the various aspects and components of playful activities to equip them to effectively identify children‟s needs, and development.
2. The Ablekuma South Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and the sampled schools organise regular work shop activities centered on the significant role of the teacher in children‟s playful activities to improve on their role as teachers and facilitators of playful activities in the classroom.
3. The Ablekuma South Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and the sampled schools should assist teachers to improve their pedagogical instructional approaches to facilitating children‟s play to effectively and comprehensively direct play for children‟s cognitive, affective and psychomotor development.
4. The Ablekuma South Metro, in collaboration with the educational directorate and the sampled schools, with the support of the Parent Teacher Association should provide the basic teaching and learning materials required for children to engage in meaningful and intellectual playful activities. The government and other stakeholders should be educated on the role and significance of play to facilitate the funding and support for early childhood education.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

The study investigated play activities of early learners in public schools‟ kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro in the Accra Metropolitan assembly. Future researchers should consider increasing the sample size of the study. The study employed the cross-sectional survey design, future studies should consider using mixed method designs to explore and quantify the perceptions of respondents. The perception of parents should also be considered of playful activities to ascertain it significance.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for Teachers

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION WINNEBA
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

I am Fosu Gordon Gyeabour a master of philosophy student in the Department of Early Childhood Education. This questionnaire is meant for collecting data on a study being conducted on the topic: "Play activities for early learners: The case of selected public Kindergartens in the Ablekuma South Metro in Accra, in Ghana." As a Kindergarten teacher your views are considered very significant in this regard. I therefore wish to solicit your assistance. Be assured that the data collected will be used solely for academic purposes. Should the data be published your identity will not be disclosed. Taken part in this study is voluntary. However, if you decide to be part,you are kindly requested to read through the items and respond to them as frankly and objectively as possible. Thanks for being part of the study.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please place a tick (√) in the appropriate box.

1. Gender
   a. Male [ ]
   b. Female [ ]
2. Age Range
   a. Below 25 years [ ]
   b. 25-29 years [ ]
   c. 30-34 years [ ]
   d. 40-44 years [ ]
   e. 45-49 years [ ]
   f. 50-54 years [ ]
   g. 55-59 years [ ]

3. Professional Level

   a. Cert. A [ ]

   b. Cert in ECE [ ]

   c. Diploma in ECE [ ]

   d. HND in ECE [ ]

   e. Degree in ECE [ ]

   f. Master‟s in Education [ ]

4. Working Experience as KG teacher

   a. Less than 1 year [ ]

   b. 1-5 years and below [ ]

   c. 6-10 years [ ]

   d. 16-20 years above [ ]

   e. 21 years and above [ ]

SECTION B: EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' VIEW OF PLAYFUL ACTIVITIES *By use of a tick please indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) or (SD) Strongly Disagree with the following statements.*

No.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
5.	I balance both theory and practice of play as much as possible in the teaching and learning process				
6.	Through play activities I identify how the child may be assisted in learning				
7.	Play activities provides me the opportunity to ascertain capability of child and the appropriate support				
8.	The use of play in a pre-school is to motivate children for curriculum-based learning tasks that facilitate easy learning				
9.	During playful activities, I plan activities that reflect the aims and objectives inconformity with the educational goals in the national curriculum.				
10.	I consider children`s play as an educational tool for teaching and learning.				
11.	My concept and perspective of play is to promote the development of motor and cognitive skills				
12.	Through play, I promote the development of social and emotional competencies for children.				
13.	The use of play helps children to think logically and acquire language skills.				
14.	Children‟s play are joyous moment in the early years setting.				

SECTION C: THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN SUPPORTINGAND GUIDING PLAY ACTIVITIES

By use of a tick please indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) or (SD) Strongly Disagree with the following statements.

No.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
15.	When am present, children tend to perceive an activity as not play and approach a task less playfully which hinders learning.				
16.	Children display less evidence of metacognitive monitoring and control when working under my supervision				
17.	My role as a teacher is considered essential in enabling children‟s development through play.				
18.	I plan an environment for play and support and enhance learning through play				
19.	There is a positive relationship between me and the pupils and the degree of control between us.				
20.	My role as a teachers increase stress and anxiety and demotivate the children				
21.	I encourage children to plan their own activities for some of the time and they make considerable social gains.				
22.	I use a combination of Teachers-led and child-led activities to improve play.				
23.	Through an active my active role in playful activities, children reach their full potential				
24.	I sometimes provide materials, safe spaces and toys to encourage children‟s play without interfering.				

SECTION D: STRATEGIES USED BY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS TO IMPROVE PLAY IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By use of a tick please indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), agree (A), Disagree (D) or (SD) Strongly Disagree with the following statements.

No.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
25.	I use a set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place.				
26.	I mostly use interactive process between teacher and learner to enhance the learning environment"				
27.	I use thedirect instruction approach in teaching through play				
28.	I use the child-centered approach in which learning is playbased and child-directed				
29.	I promote learning through some mix of direct instruction and play.				
30.	I inculcate teaching methods that enables children to master certain basic skills before more advanced learning can occur				
31.	I believed that basic skills are acquired through explicit teaching, repetition, and practice				
32.	I carefully sequence the learning process with task analysis and a comprehensive system for monitoring pupils progress,				
33.	The child-centered approach to early childhood education views learning as child- directed rather than teacher-directed and I enforce that.				
34.	I believe both the child-centered and direct instruction approaches are effective in promoting children"s learning and development.				

SECTION E: THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE USE OF PLAY

By use of a tick please indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) or (SD)Strongly Disagree with the following statements.

No.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
35.	The principal challenge to play activities is an effective and well-targeted intervention.				
36.	Lack of adequate funding hinders children‟s playful activities				
37.	Limited local and national administration capacity hinders adequate playful activities of children				
38.	Low social demand for quality Early Childhood Services makes it impossible to improve children‟s play.				
39.	The low quality or lack of infrastructure poses as a challenge to children‟s playful activities				
40.	Inadequate teaching and learning materials hinders children‟s playful activities.				
41.	Poor curricula which are not well adapted to the needs of children hinders children playful activities				
42.	Lack of qualified teachers to facilitate playful activities poses a challenges to children‟s playful activities				
43.	Lack of access to quality early childhood prevent children‟s playful activities				
44.	The financial demands of playful materials possess a challenge to playful activities.				

Thank you for your cooperation