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PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN THE KASSENA NANKANA MUNICIPALITY

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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, **Anastasia L. Kanluki**, hereby declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotation and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Signature: …………..………………

Date: ………………………………

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

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

Prof. Hinneh Kusi (Supervisor)

Signature: …………..………………

Date: ………………………………

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my lovely husband, Fredrick Balua and my son, Charles Balua.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the pre-school teachers' perception on best practices in early childhood in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study employed quantitative approaches through the use of self-developed questionnaires. The sample for the study was 217 pre-school teachers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The findings from the study revealed that pre-school teachers were aware of and have knowledge about early childhood educational best recommended practices. Also, results from the study indicated that even though preschool teachers had knowledge about the early childhood best practices; they did not apply or implement them in the classroom. Some barriers including lack of teaching learning materials hindered the implementation of early childhood educational best practices among pre-school teachers in Kassena Nankana Municipality. It was recommended from the study that, the Ministry of Education should ensure that the developmental goals and objectives in the early childhood development curriculum reflected local values and informed approaches to classroom practices. It was further revealed that the curriculum should also reflect the customary practices, traditions, and rituals that touched the lives of children in various cultural contexts and encourage the participation of children in the everyday activities of their community. Early childhood teachers should be given professional training.
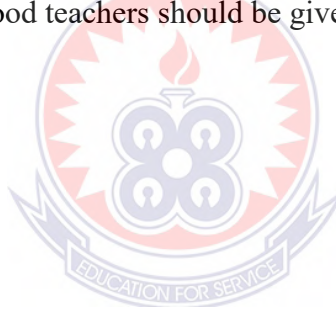
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Background to the Study

As the first country in Africa to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Republic of Ghana has a record of attention to children's rights and development. More recently, the Government of Ghana declared its commitment to addressing the developmental needs of children and achieving the Millennium Development Goals through policies and plans including the National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy, adopted in 2004. This policy provides a framework for government and other stakeholders to promote survival, development, and protection for children from birth to age 8, emphasizing integrated and coordinated services among other strategies for achieving this goal.

Key indicators have in recent years shown improvement in young children's education, health, and social welfare status in Ghana. Increases in pre- primary education attendance have been substantial and have exceeded national goals. However, rates of maternal and child mortality, malnutrition, and lack of access to adequate water and sanitation remain high, and substantial disparities in these areas remain across income groups and geographic regions.

According to Thorsen (2008), beliefs will always be part of our lives whether it is everyday activities, theories, philosophies, or the art of teaching. This point is further reinforced by Myers (2004) who alluded to the fact that practice may also affect beliefs.

At a time when the early childhood education sector in Ghana is implementing several curricula reforms influenced by the ideals of Western goals of developmentally

1

appropriate practices (DAP), it is important to examine the beliefs and perceptions held by teachers in the education sector. This is especially relevant in light of the fact that some of these goals may be unconnected to Ghana's cultural values, beliefs, and educational priorities. Ghana's practices have been influenced by our colonized past and Cannella and Viruru (2004) claimed that justification for the "the continued use of out-dated practices and attitudes need to be challenged" (p. 7).

It is not necessarily a new idea to think of the world as a constantly changing place, nor is it new to philosophize about how education should respond to these changes. Education has long been recognized as a powerful force for shaping culture, transmitting cultural values to the next generation of learners and influencing social change (Rename, 2007; Abraham, 2012). Understanding the complexity of today's changing world, recognizing inequality as a persistent and growing problem and accepting the consequences of actions taken by generations past-while seeking better, more sustainable choices for the future-are only a few of the challenges facing educators today.

Educators have the opportunity to candidly accept these challenges and take an active stance in addressing them (Boutte, 2008). One vehicle for impacting change is through the practice of Education for Developmentally Appropriate Practices. In 2007, the government of Ghana declared the commitment to the developmental needs of children by making the kindergarten part of the basic education. The policy provides a framework for promoting DAP in order to foster language, cognition and social competence among the children.

Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP) is an approach to teaching grounded on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early

education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development (Cochran, 2007). Charlesworth (1998) argued that DAP is for everyone with diverse socioeconomic status, culture, race, gender, age, or special needs. Elkind (1989) also stated that a challenging, developmentally appropriate learning environment would help children develop creative thinking and critical thinking abilities. Empirical studies have demonstrated the efficacy of DAP in enhancing preschool children's learning and development. For instance, preschool children who enrolled in DAP classrooms had better grades in science and in physical and social skills (Jones & Gullo, 1999) and scored higher on rote learning and applied knowledge skills (Huffman & Speer, 2000).

On the other hand, children in developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP) classrooms exhibit more stress behaviours than those in more DAP classrooms (Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, & Kirk, 1990). According to National Association of Educating the Young in U.S (2001) reported that one of America's larger challenges regarding ECE is the dearth in the workforce, partly due to low compensation for rigorous work. Because the teacher is critical in the implementation of the developmentally appropriate approach, the teacher's perception about classroom practices is important. Research showed that teachers' developmentally appropriate perception not only influences program quality but children's learning outcome. McCarty, Abbott-Shim, and Lambert (2001) found that teachers in low-quality classrooms have more inappropriate perceptions than those teachers in high-quality classrooms. Jones and Gullo (1999) found that teachers' developmentally appropriate perceptions were associated with children's positive social skills ratings, but not academic achievement. Research findings indicate teachers' perceptions and how they are related to their

practice are important issues in the delivery of early childhood education (Rusher, McGrevin, & Lambiotte, 2011).

It is worthwhile to note that preschool teachers as key players in young children's education have a crucial role to play in best recommended practices. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity (McDonnell, 1999), establishing a reciprocal relationship with families, (Lundin, 2000), and creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning (NAEYC, 2012) in the classroom. In preschool best recommended practices, both personal and environmental factors are effective. As researchers, we agree to the idea of National Association of Education of Young Children that teachers, as human beings, bring their past experience into classroom settings so their beliefs regarding how children learn and develop affect quality of the preschool best recommended practices. In the study of Cronin- Jones (2006), it was elaborated that if the teachers' existing belief structures were not consistent with the philosophy of the curriculum, then they affect the success of curriculum adversely.

Parallel to this study, Kern, Kruse and Roehring (2007) also maintains the ideas that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are strongly influencing the best recommended practices in early childhood education. In other words, once the teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented, then the performance of the teacher in the real classroom setting is affected positively during implementation. Furthermore, besides appreciating the philosophy of the new curriculum, Park (2008) suggested that understanding of the curricula by the teachers is crucial for proper implementation. Because once the teachers do not comprehend

4

what the curriculum's theoretical framework is in details, they will not be able to successfully implement best recommended practices in early childhood education.

1.1   Statement of the Problem

The concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) is based on Western ideology (Gupta, 2006). Literature indicates that, there is reform of the early childhood sector because pedagogical competence of the early childhood practitioner has come under greater scrutiny (Williams & Charles, 2008). It has also been accepted that in the early childhood years children gain the educational experiences needed to set the foundation for academic skills in the later years (Saracho & Spodek, 2008). The quality of the early childhood teacher at this level, therefore, becomes of utmost importance in setting this foundation.

Although reform has been endorsed by teachers in the sector, successful implementation rests on the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and practices of these teachers. Equally, strides have been made with regards to training of teachers to cater for the needs of children in their early years yet, it is perceived that impact is not to be felt generally (UNICEF, 2011). According to UNICEF (2011), institutions for teacher training have been established, but only a small proportion of teachers are formally trained.

More so, in-service training sessions for KG teachers tend to focus on narrow methodological topics or specific resource, as a result of inadequate comprehensive training agenda or syllabus for Kindergarten teachers (UNICEF, 2011). The research problem exists because in spite of the plethora of studies on perceptions of teachers on best educational practices, the context of the preschool or early childhood environment has not been fully explored. Limited studies touched on early childhood

5

education especially preschool classroom environment. The vast majority of studies on the nature of best educational practices focused on primary, junior high and senior high school settings and therefore did not address issues in best educational practices of preschool teachers. The present study is an attempt to fill this research gab by exploring preschool teachers' perceptions of early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality, of Ghana.

1.2   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the perceptions preschool teachers hold about early childhood educational best practices in Kassena Nankana Municipality.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Assess the knowledge level early childhood teachers have about the best recommended practices in early childhood education in the Kassena Nankana Municipality.

2. Determine the extent to which teachers apply the best practices in the Municipality.

3. Uncover the barriers in the implementation of early childhood educational best practices in the Municipality.

1.4   Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is level the knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality?

2. To what extent do preschool teachers use the best recommended practices in the Municipality?

6

3. What are the barriers in the implementation of early childhood educational best practices in the Municipality?

1.5   Significance of the Study

This study intends to offer insight into perceptions of childhood teachers about early childhood best recommended practices and how these influence their classroom practices. My study would also serve as a reference for educators who would like to know more about teacher beliefs and self-perceptions or how reflective teaching can be used to improve classroom practices in early childhood settings (Cole, 1997). Hopefully, the study would also affect how we look at early childhood teachers, challenge our own beliefs and perceptions of early childhood teachers and the policy directions of the sector.

Again, the study aimed at helping in examining the perceived knowledge levels of preschool teachers concerning early childhood educational best practices and how it can be used to polish our younger ones towards the future with regards to the future. Based on the findings, Stakeholders, Non-Governmental

Organizations, Curriculum Designers, Ghana Educational Service, Ministry of Education and interested bodies stand the chance to benefit as they would be abreast with issues about early childhood educational best recommended practices. This would enable the policy makers and the stakeholders to work out and implement the findings as the situation continue to live with us as a nation.

1.6   Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to selected pre-school teachers' perception on best recommended practices in Early Childhood in the Kassena Nankana Municipality and

does not include public basic and senior high school teachers. The study is also limited to pre-school teachers in providing data for the study.

1.7   Definitions of Terms

Preschool Teachers: Teachers who teach between 3 and 8 years-olds children are referred to as pre-school teachers in the study.

Early Childhood Curriculum: According to Langenbach and Neskora, (2017) the early childhood curriculum is a product of both long- range and short term planning.

Preschool - includes all ECIs for children from three to six years. The school is privately owned, by an individual, corporation or faith-based institution and operate with private fees and fundraising.

Day Care Centre - usually refers to full-day programs for young children up through the age of three.

Infant Department - sections of public primary or all age schools which operate like a basic school for children ages four and five, prior to entrance to Grade One.

Infant School - Government owned schools which operate under similar Ministry supervision as the basic schools.

1.8   Organization of the Study

The success of any research work depends on how it is orderly organized. This thesis is organized into five chapters. The thesis starts with chapter one which presents the introduction and provides a background to the study and then discusses key research issues such as statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, the definition of concepts, profile of the study area as well as the organisation of the study chapters.

Chapter two is the literature review. The literature was based on early childhood education, the importance of early childhood education, models of early childhood education and empirical review. In chapter three, the research methods were outlined including the research design, sampling techniques, and procedures, population definition and instrumentation. It also describes the data sources and methods of data collection, ethical concerns and data handling procedures. Chapter four is the data analysis and discussion, and finally, in the last chapter, a summary of finding, conclusions, and recommendations are offered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

This chapter introduces readers to existing information which different authors and scholars have written about the problem. This would enable the researcher to build upon the works of others as a way of establishing the need for this research. The literature review has been grouped under the following sub headings; historical perspectives of pre-school programme, the concept of early childhood education, the importance of early childhood education, early childhood teachers' beliefs and selfperceptions, Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in early childhood education, early childhood practices and challenges in Ghana, challenges of implementing ECE educational practices, roles and responsibilities of pre-school teachers, parents participation and responsibilities in pre-school education and the role of government in pre-school education.

2.1   Theoretical Framework on Early Childhood Education

The theories underpinning the study are the Maria Montessori Model and Reggio Emilia Model.

2.1.1   Maria Montessori Model

The name itself comes from Maria Montessori, an Italian medical doctor who was influenced by Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi thinks that a teacher must have a special training combining both intellectuality and the ability to touch the hearts by feeling respect and sympathy for the children (Montessori, 1972). Montessori followed the ideas of Pestalozzi and she focused on the process of normal development to discover how human beings could reach their potential more fully than they did in traditional

10

schools. Montessori worked with younger children before elementary schools and Montessori began her experiment in January 1907. She viewed her schools as labourites in which to study how children learn best (Lillard, 2005).

According to Montessori's philosophy, a child-sized environment offering beauty and order is the best for children's learning because it is cultivating and stimulating. In such an environment, children may choose their own work- activities that have meaning and purpose for them. In addition, there are times when carefully sequenced and structured materials (sensory materials) are introduced by the teacher to the child (Wortham, 2006). The Montessori curriculum is divided into motor education, sensory education, and language and intellectual education (Wortham, 2006).

Motor education: The Montessori classroom is designed in order to provide children's free movement during the day. Children's fine motor skills are enhanced by the sensory materials as well as the work in the area of practical life. In addition, as children learn to pour materials, sweep, polish shoes, they have the opportunity to foster both large and fine motor skills.

Sensory education: Manipulative and didactic materials are used for sensory education. The sensorial curriculum includes a large number of sets of materials that promote seriation, classification and conservation activities in a variety of media. The materials are sequenced according to difficulty with control of error being a primary objective.

Language and intellectual education: The sensorial materials are part of intellectual education. The teacher involves in the careful pronunciation of words as he or she talks to the children and during teaching a concept, it is common to use physical dimensions of the objects such as big, thin, large and small. On the other hand, there

11

is a three part lesson and when learning, for example, concepts of large and small, the teacher would first say, "This is the small ball". Second the teacher wants the child to show the small ball and finally, the teacher wants the child to name the object.

Writing and reading activities are also crucial in the Montessori curriculum. First, children's fine motor skills are enhanced by active hands-on activities with the sensory materials. At the same time, the visual-motor understanding of alphabet letters and how to form them is introduced. Exercises to write letters, words and how to read them are done. Once a child does those independently, reading and writing are expanded to writing sentences and reading simple books.

2.1.2 Reggio Emilia Model

Reggio Emilia, a small city in industrial northern Italy, established what is now called "The Reggio Emilia approach" shortly after the Second World War when working parents helped to build new schools for their young children (Goffin & Wilson, 2001). Founded by Loris Malaguzzi, the early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, have captured the attention of educators from all over the world. Inspired by John Dewey's progressive education movement, Lev Vygotsky's belief in the connection between culture and development, and Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development developed his theory and philosophy of early childhood education from direct practice in schools for infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers (Thorton & Brunton, 2009).

The teachers in Reggio Emilia are partners and collaborators in learning with the children and parents. The teachers become skilled observers of children in order to plan in response to the children. Each group of children is assigned co- teachers. There is no lead teacher or director of the school. A pedologist, a person trained in

12

early childhood education, meet with the teachers weekly. Every school has an atelierista, who is trained in visual arts, working closely with teachers and children. The hundreds of languages of children are the term teachers use in referring to the process of children depicting their understanding through one of many symbolic languages, including drawing, sculpture, dramatic play and writing. Teachers and children work together to solve any problems that arise (Goffin & Wilson, 2001).

2.2   Historical Perspectives of Pre-School Programme

Throughout the history of early education, there have been a number of philosophers, educators, and theorists who have observed young children. Friedrich Frobel, the 19th century German who created and named the kindergarten (German to children's garden). Children between the age of 3 and 6 spent their days working in identically laid out gardens, participating in especially composed singing, games, and interacting with materials designed to teach a series of specific skills (Suzanne & Kristine, 2004). Frobel is generally considered the founder of early childhood education not only because he was the first to design a curriculum specifically for young children but because he introduced play as a major medium of instruction (Carol, 2000).

A second example, still in existence, is the curriculum developed by Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor who was inspired, in part, by Frobel's materials. Observing and working with the same age children, she focused on creating curricula that permitted youngsters to advance in their learning to the greatest extent possible. Her learning materials were near as prescribed and rigid as Frobel's, but Montessori also was dedicated to creating citizens for democracy and built a variety of choices into the curricula and the teaching methods (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000).

Now a day's two approaches or a combination of both is being implemented as at the leading world kindergarten school methodology for teaching children. Kindergarten by and large is a product of 20th Century, beginning from 1940 to mid1960's in which preschool education has become the subject of serious studies by scholars and researchers because this time research evidences and provocative literature on child development and early learning had motivated the community in general and policy makers in particular. This idea shows that better economic development and the advancement of human knowledge on the importance of early learning brought the need for the establishment and expansion of preschool education all over the world including our continent, Africa. However, the differences in economic development and educational status among the nations of the world created disparities in the development of preschool education (Gama, 2007).

2.3   The Concept of Early Childhood Education

The definition of the term early childhood education depends on the angle one picks it from. In terms of the child's life, early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age (Miles & Browne, 2004). Grotewell and Burton (2008) also shared this definition as they elaborated it accordingly as the time between the zero and eight years of age. However, by school terms, early childhood education incorporates the group settings for infants through elementary school grade three (Miles & Browne, 2004). In other words, early childhood education is a special branch of education serving with children from infancy to elementary grade level of three (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). As definitions of these authorities imply, it is believe that early childhood education brings or exposes children (birth to eight) into the world. The significance of the early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years. This situation is complementary with

14

research results based on long term effects of early education to later life (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008).

2.4 The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education, within the last few decades, considered different fields (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005) such as developmental psychology, cultural psychology, childhood studies, cultural anthropology, history, and philosophy. This is because recent studies showed that babies and young children are born with the capacity to understand the world around them (Nutbrown, 2006). More so, children brains are ready to learn when they come to the world. During this process; both the environment and genes take an important role which in turn, builds the brain (Levitt, 2008). Considering what had been said so far by authorities in respect to childhood education, it can be asserted that children are being perceived as competent learners rather than empty slates. This has, therefore, brought changes in the way of perceiving children or early childhood education. The readiness of children to learn even when they are just born triggered the necessity of early childhood education both for the individual child and for the society as a whole.

Longitudinal studies have shown that early childhood education is the period when children's' develop more rapidly and expand their intellectual faculties as they grow. Therefore, education in this crucial period creates significance for the development of children. In a study conducted by Barnett (1995), it was found that getting an early childhood education provided an increase in the IQ level of children in the short term and in the long term, it increased the child's school achievement.

Early childhood education also becomes more beneficial especially, for the children coming from the low socio-economic background. Barnett (1995) identified benefits

15

of being exposed to early education for children coming from low-income families as cognitive growth and school readiness. Besides children from the low socioeconomic background, good quality of early childhood education provides early reading and math skills to children from high and middle socioeconomic status. Early education cultivates children in terms of socialization rather than purely academic enhancement such as math and reading. Webb (2003) elaborated that children learn cooperation through education in child care centres and such skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in the society. Regarding socialization, parents also share the same perspective. In the study of Seng (1994), it was revealed that one of the biggest reasons for parents sending children to early childhood education centre is to get them socialized. In fact, in a longitudinal study, Kağitçibasi (1996) explained that children who received early childhood education became emotionally and socially more competent adults compared to the ones who did not receive early education.

In addition to the above exposition on early childhood education, we also have the conviction that proper early childhood education will help children enjoy academic benefits; early education provides children a better future in the long term such as preparing them for school and increase in high school graduation rates.

It is however imperative for the Government of Ghana to start to pay particular attention to the early childhood education since it has been proved that good quality of early education has long lasting effects on the children's later life and very productive for the society. To affirm this idea, Oppennheim and MacGregor (2002) established that children who receive early education are less likely to involve in crime and more likely to complete their high school education and get a college education. Other studies such as Chicago Longitudinal study and the Cost, Quality

16

and Child outcome study indicated that getting high-quality early childhood education makes children become successful students and citizens in their later lives (Reynolds & Ou, 2004).

On the other hand, according to the World Bank Report (2005), between 0-6 years of age, each 1 dollar invested on children was returned to a fold of 7.6 dollars in the future as a result of the productivity gained through early childhood education. Parallel to this study, Reynolds and Ou (2004) indicated that the rate of the return of the investment in people in early childhood period is higher compared to investment in other periods of human life.

In addition, research results support that through early childhood education, children are exposed to good quality experience, which allows the connections in their brains to develop and this is of immense importance to the society. Such results opened the way to start education of brains as early as possible. In one of the studies conducted by Knudson (2004), it was elaborated that developmental flexibility of brain wiring or its ability to change due to influences of experience were affected by both genes and early environmental factors. So, the necessity occurs for educators, policy makers, and others in the society helping children to construct their initial brain architecture by providing education for them in their early ages. Findings of the longitudinal and cross sectional studies (Barnett, 1995; Oppennheim & MacGregor, 2002; Reynolds & Ou, 2004) related the benefits of early childhood education provided logical reasons to emphasize on early education for a better society. Besides, in the last twenty years, sociocultural changes such as getting into the information age and changes in the world order through globalization triggered early childhood education to be a concern of many societies.

2.5   Early Childhood Teachers' Beliefs and Self-Perceptions

More recent researches have pointed to the fact that a teacher's belief system will determine the quality of education in the classroom (Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2012). According to Fang (1996), the teachers' beliefs or philosophy affect teaching and learning. Research also suggests that there is a strong relationship between the teacher's thoughts and actions in understanding teacher effectiveness (Brophy & Good, 1974; Edwards, 2003; Leung, 2012).

Kagan (1992) viewed teachers' beliefs as their "assumptions about their students, classrooms, and academic materials to be taught." (p. 65). Teachers' beliefs are therefore what teachers say and do in the classroom based on their thinking about educational practices. This point is supported by Lockhart (1998) who posited that a teacher's action is reflective of what they know and believe and this knowledge and belief become the philosophical framework which guide their teaching methodology.

Beliefs also emerge from one's past and present experiences and socialization or cultural models that were presented (Raths, 2001). The development of these beliefs is based on previous experiences in the teachers' life and has a bearing on how they relate to the children in their classroom (Lockhart, 1998). This point is especially critical in light of the cultural-historical legacy of early childhood education in Jamaica and the teacher pedagogy that is still evident today. This brings me to the point of self-perception, especially as it relates to the professional self. How one views self has an impact on one's behaviour. According to Bem (1972) SelfPerception theory, Individuals come to *'know* ' their own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states partially by inferring them from Observations of their own overt behaviour and/or Circumstances in which this behaviour occurs. (p. 2).

In other words, an individual's self-perception is formed implicitly by meanings derived from events and interactions in the environment. Teachers are no different from their perceptions and beliefs influence their actions (Kagan, 1992; Borg, 2001).

They concluded that whether teachers were confident or unsure of their abilities, this perception is reflected in their classroom practices. In fact, Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, (2000), concluded from their study of Netherland secondary school teachers' perception of their professional identity, that self-perception is the schema from which teachers derive their professional identity as experts in subject matter, pedagogy, and didactic teaching.

This has similar implications for EC classroom practice. The early childhood teacher's personal and professional experiences are intertwined and are linked to their personal and professional identity (Court, Merav & Ornan, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Court, et al. (2009), described the professional self as "a product of the interaction between the teachers' personal experiences and the social, cultural and institutional environment within which they work on a daily basis." (p. 208). In their study of ten Israeli teachers' reasons for choosing the teaching profession and their perceptions of their roles as teachers, the researchers drew a relationship between the teachers' expressed beliefs about early childhood education and their roles as teachers. According to Court et al., these teachers perceived themselves to be 'nurturers', and "perceived their work as allowing for an intensive relationship with children, contributing to their moral, social and cognitive development..." (pp. 213-214).

However, Garvis, Fluckiger, and Twigg (2012), from their study on pre- service teachers' beliefs and perceptions, alluded to the fact that this may be an "idealized or romanticized view of early childhood education." (p. 101). While the participants in

their study also perceived teaching in a positive, almost idyllic fashion, Garvis, Fluckiger, and Twigg commented that the teachers "lacked understanding of the complexity of the profession" (p. 101). They called this a 'deficit' and warned that this perception of the early childhood teacher faces a challenge, as dissonance may arise when the pre-service teacher experiences a 'reality shock' in the real classroom versus what was experienced during field work. This disequilibrium may re-position the teacher's belief system and at its extreme, may lead to the teacher lowering his/her own expectations "to risk a self- assessment of failure" (p. 101). It would suggest therefore that socio-cultural contextual factors must be taken into consideration when looking at beliefs and self-perceptions.

In the same manner, teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions may also determine the nature of the interactions that occur between them and the children they teach (Lim & Torr, 2007). According to Miller and Smith (2004), teachers' beliefs have an influence on their nature of interaction with, and the resources and structure that they provide to children. Additionally, their beliefs also unconsciously affect the attitudes they convey to children (Miller & Smith, 2004). The teacher's attitude and behaviour will have an impact on the young child's emotional well-being and positive sense of self, and so the quality of teacher's interaction and relationship with the child are very important (Davies, 2008). Thus the teacher's beliefs shape his/her approach to teaching and influence instructional strategies and performance in the classroom as these beliefs help to define their professional identity (Cheng et al., 2009; Tsai & Chuang, 2005).

Early childhood education in Jamaica is at a critical juncture and as such its services are evolving and changing to meet global standards. The teacher is crucial in this

evolution of providing high-quality services as these services are based on a secure relationship between the children and the teacher (Sims, 2010). This secure relationship will also impact on effective pedagogy because, according to Bowman, Donovan and Burn (2001), young children depend on the adults with whom they interact and in many instances, it is their classroom teacher. Brophy and Good (1974) described teachers as socializing agents who have a significant influence on students' behaviour as they transmit powerful interpretations of values and expectations. However as Court, et al. (2009) found in their study, early childhood teachers' selfperception as professionals are subjected to constant testing and shaping by the environment within which they work and as such, acknowledgement and recognition by significant others, including parents, will have a direct positive effect on the teachers' self-esteem..

2.6 Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in Early Childhood Education

In this section, the researcher discuss the guiding principles of (DAP) and its impact on early childhood education and reform. Because DAP operates as a foundation for teaching among the five early childhood teachers who took part in the study, I will also discuss the contentious issue of what constitutes "Appropriate" and conclude with highlighting research on early childhood teachers' beliefs about DAP. As mentioned in the previous section, research has led to different ways of looking at children's development in a holistic way.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices presented at the NAEYC Conference in 1987. DAP is defined as "the outcome of a process of teacher decision making that draws on at least three, critical interrelated bodies of knowledge: (a) what teachers know about

how children develop and learn; (b) what teachers know about the individual children in their group; and (c) knowledge of the social and cultural context in which those children live and learn" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). DAP also serves two major purposes namely, a) to enhance the quality of early childhood experiences of young children by using developmentally appropriate activities, materials and having developmentally appropriate expectations in early childhood programmes and b) to balance academic instruction in early childhood programmes with other socio-emotional and physical development aspects (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Additionally, teachers need to meet the children where they are. This involves observing children's engagement with materials, activities, and planning curriculum and adapting teaching strategies based on observation; assessing what children already know and their interests, and keeping teaching goals in mind (Bredekamp, 2011). So in essence, developmentally appropriate practice is teaching that is in keeping with a child's age, experiences, abilities, and interests, that seeks to help the child reach challenging yet achievable goals (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC,

2012). Built on a constructivist platform, and informed by the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Schunk, 2000), this approach also emphasizes the role of play as a crucial vehicle for children to learn the language and develop social, physical and problemsolving skills. Topcu (2011) supports this point by claiming that "Teachers whose epistemological beliefs are consistent with a constructivist approach pay more attention to student discussion, interaction, and problem-solving..." (p. 100), as opposed to teachers who use traditional approaches. Therefore the use of physical punishment, prolonged seatwork, and rote-learning without hands-on experiences

would be considered developmentally inappropriate practices and not to be encouraged in the classroom. DAP soon, therefore, became the 'best recommended practices' model and guiding principle for early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2012).

These contextual concerns included issues such as learning expectations, curriculum, classroom practices and decision-making, the role of culture and language, and including children with special needs. The statement was revised to reflect these ongoing concerns and acted as a guideline for teaching children from birth to 8 years. NAEYC also recommended practices based on age groups, namely, infants and toddlers, pre-schoolers, kindergarten and early primary grades (Bredekamp, 2011; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2012).

File (2012) still challenged some of these notions of the recently revised edition of DAP. She argued that the philosophical underpinnings of DAP still had strong ties to traditional child development theories with child development "framed as universal and singular" (p. 34). She added that the DAP statements "provided little room for philosophy and values" (p. 34) and may not sufficiently contribute to curriculum decisions. She also bemoans the fact that the voices of children's families have been largely silent in the professional discourse and suggests that "Children's families and communities provide an understanding of desirable traits and skills" (p. 39) and so should shape what should be part of the curriculum. Blaise and Ryan (2012) support this view and concluded that the early childhood curriculum shares a complex yet inter-relationship with not only content and methodology that it contains, but a sociocultural relationship with the people it serves.

23

2.6.1 Early Childhood Teacher knowledge on Best Practices in Early Childhood Education

According to Bredekamp (2011), DAP has a history of well-grounded research about children's learning and development and provides scientifically- based guidance for early childhood teachers (p. 89). These research studies also form the basis for NAEYC's work on DAP (Bredekamp, 2011). Since the late 1980s there has a been a growing body of research especially out of the United States, that supports the effectiveness of DAP in children's learning, (Bredekamp, 1987; Burts et.al., 1990, Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Hart, Yang, Charlesworth and Burts, 2003).

The study by Hart, et al., (2003) was significant as it revealed there was a negative correlation between developmentally inappropriate practices and student outcome. The study concluded that regardless of children's socioeconomic status, race or gender, they were more likely to experience more stress and attendant behaviour problems. They were also more like to lag behind in mathematics and reading achievement compared to their peers from DAP classrooms. This study was corroborated by a study conducted nearly a decade earlier by Marcon (1992).

In that study, Marcon concluded that children who experienced child-initiated DAP, had better language, mathematics and science skills compared to children who experienced more teacher-directed instruction. The study also concluded that children in DAP classrooms had better social skills and work habits and possessed a stronger self-esteem, compared to children coming from developmentally inappropriate classrooms (Marcon, 1992). Research from Head Start, a poster child for DAP, DAP approach, also supported positive correlations between DAP and children's cognitive

and socio- emotional development (Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix, Guest, Welsh, Greenberg, Blair, Nelson & Gill, 2008). The Head Start program utilizes 'hands-on' lessons and activities and specific teaching activities that promote the development of children's socio-emotional, language and emergent literacy skills (Bredekamp, 2011).

However, the successful implementation of DAP relies heavily on the early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning (Vartuli, 2005; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb & Gheith, 2010). According to Leung (2012) that "teachers are an important component of high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs." (p. 39) and as such, they have an impact on student outcomes.

There is much debate regarding the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) pointed to the gap that exists between teacher beliefs and practices by arguing that "there is often a discrepancy between what the research indicates and the philosophies of early childhood educators, which tend to be developmentally appropriate in nature, and their actual teaching practices, which tend to be developmentally inappropriate for young children" (p. 65). Like Kim (2011), he argue regarding this relationship within two categories, as follows: a) the relationship that exists between teachers' stated beliefs about DAP and observed practice and b) the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and reported practice (p. 12). While DAP assumes a universal view of teaching practice (Kilderry, 2012), we must not begin to think that the relationship that exists between beliefs and practice can be measured objectively in trying to determine whether a teacher is using appropriate or inappropriate practices (Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, & Gheith, 2010; Kilderry, 2012). I must point out however, that my debate is framed within the context of the role of

25

culture and what is considered developmentally appropriate practices as this has significance to my study. As such, I will be drawing on research from countries outside the United States which, although embracing the overarching principles of DAP, the findings showed varying beliefs when it came to implementation.

2.6.2 Early Childhood Teachers Use of Best Practices of Early Childhood Education

NAEYC's (2012) DAP guidelines also emphasized the importance of play. Their policy statement on play states that "Play is an important vehicle for developing selfregulation as well as promoting language, cognition, and social competence..." (p. 2).

Smidt (2011), views play as a way of being able to use hands-on or real or life-like situations to answer questions that arise in children's heads as they constantly seek to make sense of their lives, experiences, and feelings. (p. 3). She went further to opine about the appropriateness of play by stating that play is not just for pleasure but can be "cognitively challenging, requiring the child to use memory, signs, and symbols, cultural tools including language, social skills like negotiation and planning and sharing, prediction. Of such import is play that it continues to be taken seriously by academic researchers and policy-makers (Wood & Attifield, 2005).

In defining play, Fleer (2012) posits two theories of play namely, developmental/maturational, where the play is internally driven, and a cultural-historical perspective which suggests that "rules of everyday life and the child's experiences of everyday practice shape how the play is enacted" (p. 26). Wood and Attifield (2005) however believed that play cannot be defined or categorized as it is context-dependent and the contexts vary (p. 5). As the contexts vary, so do the types

26

of play. There are different types of play such as role-play, imaginative play, sociodramatic play, heuristic play, constructive play, fantasy play, free-flow play, structured play, and rough-and-tumble play, all resulting in a variety of learning and developmental outcomes (Wood & Attifield, 2005).

There are many benefits of play to academic learning (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Fleer, 2010; Sherwood, 2010). However, the role of the teacher is important in providing meaningful learning experiences for children. It is therefore important for teachers to observe and assess children while they are engaged in play activities. Drake (2009) claimed that observing children is vital to understanding children's interests and learning needs and is a significant feature of the 'teaching' role (p. 186).

This has implications for DAP. One of the challenges faced by Ghana n EC teachers is how to make learning relevant to the children and connect subject matter knowledge with students' everyday lives and existing knowledge (Fleer, 2010; Smidt, 2011). Both researchers endorse the fact that children benefit most when play and learning are relevant.

Another implication or challenge is the importance of teachers interacting and participating with the children during play. The teacher, although the observer should not just be a spectator, a participant taking care to give the children ownership of what they are doing. If the play is a natural response to the environment (Moyles, 2001), then the teacher may miss a great teaching moment by not participating in play activities. Unfortunately, traditionally, many Ghana EC teachers view their roles as 'supervisor' of children's play activities.

2.7   Barriers of Implementing ECE Educational Practices in Ghana

In a post-modern world, the concept of childhood has made a significant shift in meaning as adults and children share very much the same world (Mook, 2007; Janzen, 2008). In this technologically rich, information saturated and sometimes chaotic world, 21st-century young children are expected to display competence in technology, creativity, and innovation. They also are expected to adapt to early formal schooling, while coping with changes in family structure and dynamics and the attendant social issues that become a part of their lived experiences (Elkind, 1998). However, by virtue of being children, they continue to have social, emotional and intellectual needs that must be met by the adults around them. It has been well documented that children's early exposure to quality learning environments that are developmentally appropriate will contribute to their cognitive, academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It is within this context that investing in early childhood education has become particularly significant, especially as postindependent Ghana seeks to bring about desired changes in the delivery of early childhood education services.

The early childhood period is divided into two stages namely: from birth to three years, and from three to six years. Like many countries around the world, the early childhood care and education system in Ghana was divided into two components, namely day-care or nursery (which accommodates infants 0-3 yrs.) and basic/infant schools (pre-schools which accommodate children 4-6). Day-care centres are full-time programs provided to working parents who need custodial care for their children.

Basic schools are community-based sponsored institutions and exist mainly as 'recognized' and 'unrecognized 'institutions. Recognized basic schools receive

financial assistance from the Government in the form of subsidies to offset teachers' salary, meals for the students, furniture and appliance and building grants. Unrecognized basic schools (often operated by the Church or private individuals) on the other hand receive no financial assistance at all from the Government and have to rely on fees charged to parents to offset teacher salary and other expenses.

Infant schools are operated by the Ministry of Education and some are attached to Primary and Primary/All Age, schools and are referred to as Infant Departments. Kindergartens are often found in privately- owned preparatory schools. All these settings provide children with readiness skills for formal schooling in Grade One. Presently there are approximately 2,661 early childhood institutions in Ghana with

140 being Government operated and 135 being Kindergarten. Basic schools account for the remaining figure (MOE, 2013). Nearly half of the total number of EC institutions are classified as 'recognized', while approximately 7% are considered 'unrecognized' (Jones, Brown & Brown, 2011).

The primary cause for concern, however, remained the delivery of early childhood education and development programs for young children. According to Davies (2008), this is due to several factors. These factors include the disparity between the quality of teachers in preparatory and government infant schools and infant departments versus those who in community basic schools. Teachers in basic schools are usually minimally trained or not formally trained unlike their counterparts in government-run institutions. Presently, the Ministry of Education is placing one trained teacher in recognized basic schools with a minimum enrolment of one hundred children. This is woefully inadequate and compromises the quality of curriculum delivery and care provided to the children (Ho, 2008).

As discussed earlier, ECE in the Caribbean evolved as a response to a need to provide custodial services to working mothers and as such, operated outside of government action for many years (Charles & Williams, 2006; Williams & Charles, 2008). Many of the facilities, especially in Ghana were unsupervised and were primarily owned by non-government organizations. The informality of the early childhood sector led to the low levels of training among the caregivers. Teachers in these facilities had a little theoretical understanding of child development and displayed a lack of awareness of appropriate early childhood pedagogical strategies (Davies, 1997; Charles & Williams, 2006). Many of these teachers had no experience and were mainly Sunday school teachers or other paraprofessionals with poor basic education and who had little or no teacher training (Charles & Williams, 2006). Much of my early childhood years were spent sitting in front of many of these teachers. This practice continued for quite a while and became a common feature within the Caribbean.

The field expanded during the 1980s with greater focus being placed on teacher training to equip teachers with the acquisition of skills needed to teach at this level as prior this, most of the teachers were being trained primarily through participation inservice training (Davies, 1997). Additionally, the University of the West (U.W.I.) and some Teachers' Colleges in Ghana and Trinidad selectively offered undergraduate degree programs. During the 1990s, the sector expanded by way of increased subventions from the Government as well as the establishment of pre-school units in primary schools. Despite this, the level of training within the region has remained low (Charles &Williams, 2006).

Historically, training for basic school teachers in Ghana took the format of workshopbased training that did not lead to certification. With the exception of

30

Barbados where a significant number of teachers possess undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in early childhood education, employment in most day-care centres in the Caribbean do not require post-secondary qualifications to become part of the support staff. The method of delivering educational content was primarily by rote learning, delivered by mostly untrained teachers. These teachers (many who came out of 'Sunday School') were inexperienced and lacked in-depth knowledge of essential child development and education principles and practices (Davies, 2008).

Presently, in order to achieve registration, basic schools are only required to have one teacher who is college trained. Amid concerns about the state of early childhood programs in Ghana and the number of untrained teachers who are still in the system, many teachers received their training through fortnightly workshops conducted by the Ministry of Education to better qualify them for their teaching roles. The University of the West Indies and Teachers' Colleges such as Mico, Shortwood, and St. Joseph's have also contributed to the improvement in the quality of pedagogical skills offered in early childhood education. This has come with the recognition that the early childhood system needs to be transformed if it is to be effective in preparing young children for a rapidly changing globalized world.

Over the last few years, Ghana has initiated a competency-based certification system aimed at upgrading the skills of teachers within the early childhood sector. Current trends in early childhood education in Ghana included increasing the professionalism of the sector through training with HEART/NCTVET certification of practitioners or "Early Childhood Workers"

Stephouse (2009) defines curriculum implementation as the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed

at enabling the same child to function effectively in a society. Putting the curriculum into operation requires an implementing agent. Stephouse (2009) identifies the teacher as the agent in the curriculum implementation process. She argues that implementation is the manner in which the teacher selects and mixes the various aspects of knowledge contained in a curriculum document or syllabus. Implementation takes place when the teacher- constructed syllabus, the teacher's personality, the teaching materials and the teaching environment interact with the learner (Stephouse, 2009).

Curriculum implementation, therefore, refers to how the planned or officially designed course of study is translated by the teacher into syllabuses, schemes of work and lessons to be delivered to students. Despite the actual and potential advantages of kindergarten education, some problems remain to be overcome before it promises can be fully realized. Regarding challenges of implementing kindergarten curriculum Snow (2003) and Bredekamp (2011) mentioned that child based, family-based and neighbourhood, community and school-based problems are basic problems to implement kindergarten curriculum as planned.

Child based: Includes age of children's severe cognitive deficiencies, hearing impairment, early language impairment, and attention deficit/Hyperactivity disorder

Family based : Includes family history of education, home literacy environment (the ability to value placed on education, literacy, press for achievement, availability and instrumental use of reading, playing, technological materials and reading with children), opportunities for verbal interaction, home language, socioeconomic status and very limited or total absence of parents involvement to the school.

32

Neighbourhood, community, and school-based: Also includes the practice for factors such as the neighbourhood where the family lives, the cultural and economic community of which the family is a part, and the school the child attends, teacher qualification, curriculum and centre facilities, time factor, availability of equipment, pedagogical factors etc.

2.8   Roles and Responsibilities of Pre-School Teachers

Teaching characteristically is a moral enterprise. The teacher, whether he/she admits it or not, is out to make the world a better place and its inhabitants' better people. Sykes and Turner (1980) noted that teachers are constantly observing the behaviour and activities of their pupils as a basis for action or intervention to maintain the smooth running of their class. Teachers play a vital role in the development of children. What children learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work, and their personal lives. Teaching practices for young children include opportunities for choice, hands-on learning, promotion of collaboration between children, use of a variety of teaching strategies, individualization, and self-regulation (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Buchanan, Burts & Pellar, 1998).

Goldstein found in a qualitative study that kindergarten teachers could address content standards in a developmentally appropriate manner by "recognizing and building on the curricular stability in kindergarten, employing instructional approaches that accommodate the children's developmental needs, setting limits, acquiescing to demands for developmentally inappropriate practices and materials, engaging in proactive education and outreach, accepting additional responsibilities, and making concessions" (Dosen, 1994. p.51). Teachers also take active roles in promoting

33

children's thinking and the acquisition of concepts and skills. These roles range from asking a well-timed question that provokes further reflection or investigation to show children how to use a new tool or procedure (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997).

To help them reach their maximum levels, teachers can encourage children to tackle tasks that challenge them and that are slightly beyond their skill levels. Teachers can structure their experiences with children and note how children use their assistance as well as what hints and cues are most helpful. Keeping anecdotal records, art portfolios, and checklists are all useful means of analysing children's progress within the ZPD. When a child reaches the maximal level of the ZPD, the teacher plans what he or she will do to help the child move forward. The upper level of the ZPD now becomes the lower level, and the whole process begins again (Rosemary, 2003). In order to make an informed decision about how to make meaningful differences while providing high-quality care and education, teachers need knowledge of child development, learning, and best recommended practices as well as tools for making sense of this vast array of information (Terri, 2001). Kindergarten teachers perform a complex and multidimensional role. They are responsible for implementing a program that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, integrated, developmentally appropriate, and culturally and linguistically responsive, and that promotes positive outcomes for all children. Kindergarten teachers need to be aware of the curriculum expectations for Grade 1 and later primary grades. Knowledge of the literacy and numeracy continue, in particular, is critical for teachers as they lay the foundation for learning. Teachers should use reflective practice, planned observation, and a range of assessment strategies to identify the strengths, needs, and interests of individual children in order to provide instruction that is appropriate for each child (Rosemary, 2003).

Teachers should promote integrated learning and allow children to handle, explore, and experiment with a variety of materials that are familiar to them or that they can connect to everyday life. Teachers should also be a balance between teacher-initiated and child- initiated activities. Teachers should also use their knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which the children live to develop and provide learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and respectful (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997).

Working with children brings with it particular responsibilities, as children look to teachers as their role models for behaviour and attitudes towards others. Teachers should find out their own behaviour and/or attitudes may come under scrutiny or question. This does not infringe on the teacher's rights as a unique individual, but is a recognition of the particular sensitivity or working with children and the power of teachers in their lives. It means it is necessary to ensure high standards of professional behaviour within early years work settings (Dosen, 1994).

2.9   Chapter Summary

The literature gives evident to conclude that DAP plays a significant role in preschool teachers understanding of the best recommended practices. All the reviewed empirical studies suggest that pre-school teachers' knowledge affect their practices in the classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

This chapter discusses the research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure and ethical consideration.

3.1   Research Paradigm

The study is hinged on positivism paradigm. Positivism provides a framework to explain reality as a criteria-given entity which can be understood objectively (Kroeze, 2012). Positivists believe in the possibility to observe and describe reality from an objective viewpoint. According to Kroeze , the characteristics of a positivist paradigm include an emphasis on the scientific methods, statistical analysis and generalizability of findings. According to a positivist epistemology, science is seen as a way to get at the truth, to understand the world well enough so that it might be predicted and controlled (Krauss, 2005).

The positivists believe in empiricism, the idea that observation and measurement are at the core of a scientific endeavour (Krauss, 2005). The purpose of using science to prove facts is to observe and measure (Krauss). The present study was scientific as it was objective, used statistics in the analysis of data and emphasised the generalisation of results; hence, the appropriateness of a positivist paradigm.

Positivist researchers are independent, detached and maintain a distance from the object of the research (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, the researcher maintained minimal interaction with participants when collecting data. Participants completed the questionnaire in their own time. Positivists go forth into the world

36

impartially separating themselves from the world they study (Krauss, 2005) and discovering knowledge which is directed at explaining relationships (Creswell, 2009). The use of questionnaires in the current study allowed the researcher to deal with facts provided by the participants rather than feelings and emotions as used in other research paradigms. The researcher remained detached from the participants as they completed the questionnaires and sought to uncover the truth about predictors that predict career choices among senior high school students objectively and impartially.

Positivism is a research strategy that argues that truth and reality are free and independent of the viewer and observer (Crossan, 2016). As such, it was appropriate for the current study that sought to establish the predictors that predict career choices among senior high school students without any interference from the researcher.

3.2   Research Approach

The study adopted the quantitative approach. Quantitative researchers operate under the assumption of objectivity (Creswell, 2009) and that there is a reality to be observed and that rational observers who look at the same phenomenon will agree on its existence (Punch, 2008). In the present study, objective findings validated the results of the study because they were based on the actual findings from the field as the researcher remained distanced from the participants.

A quantitative approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses positivist claims for developing knowledge (Creswell, 2009). The positivist paradigm leads to a scientific and systematic approach to research. A quantitative approach was used in this study as it allowed the researcher to carry out an objective analysis and generate factual knowledge through measurement. Researchers who use quantitative tools and techniques that emphasise measuring and counting are positivists in nature (Punch,

2008). The positivist approach depends on quantifiable observations that lead to the statistical analysis of data. Quantitative data is analysed using statistics (Punch, 2005). It is the numerical representation and manipulation of observations to describe and explain the phenomena (Tewksbury, 2009). Quantitative research methods are characterised by the collection of information which can predictors be analysed numerically and presented in tables for easier analysis and interpretation.

3.3   Research Design

The researcher employed descriptive survey for the study. This enabled the researcher to collect information on the issue under study. A descriptive survey deals with the collection of data so as to provide answers to the research questions or hypothesis. It presents issues as it is on the ground with less or no personal sentiments. That is to say, a descriptive study reports findings the way they exist. Typical descriptive studies are concerned with the assessment of attitudes, opinions, demographic information, conditions, and procedures. This was considered most appropriate for this research since the study seeks responses from the participants with little or no biases. The descriptive survey basically makes inquiries into the status quo; it attempts to measure what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation (Aryetal, 1990).

The above notwithstanding, Creswell (2003) holds the view that descriptive survey makes it easy to identify attributes of a large population from small groups of individuals. Again, according to Cohen, Morrison, and Manion (2008), in a

descriptive survey design, researchers gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared. Again, as recommended by

38

Leedy and Omrod (2010), descriptive surveys are suitable for purposes of making generalizations from a sample to a population so that inferences could be made about the characteristics, opinions, attitudes and past experiences of the population.

The descriptive survey determines the nature and the situation as it exists at the time of the study. The descriptive survey design describes and interprets events as they occur (Best & Kahn, 2003). It is versatile and practical, in that it identifies present conditions and points to the recent needs. It has the characteristic of analysing the relationships, differences, and trends that contribute to teacher's knowledge, challenges in early childhood best recommended practices at the pre-school level. By this, the researcher could find clues to answer the research questions or hypothesis which involve classroom related challenges (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008; Sarantakos, 2005).

The researcher employed the descriptive survey design because of its myriad of merits. For instance, the design provides a more accurate and meaningful picture of events and seeks to explain people's perception and behaviour on the basis of data gathered at a particular time (Frankel & Wallen, 2000). This would allow for in-depth follow up questions and items that are unclear to be explained. More so, descriptive survey design has the potential to provide a lot of information from quite a large sample of participants (Frankel & Wallen, 2000). It is as well considered as the best approach for the study because it is a relatively inexpensive way of getting information about people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. It assures manageability of the data collected. The descriptive survey is more economical since many subjects can be studied at the same time (Frankel & Wallen, 2000). Also, findings from the study can be generalized for the entire population.

39

3.4 Population

Population refers to the name of the large general group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and which is usually stated in theoretical terms (Neuman, 2003). Also, according to Polit and Hungler (1996), a study population reflects the entire aggregate of cases that meet designated set of criteria. The population of the study comprised the entire public basic school teachers in the Kassena Nankana Municipality.

According to Amedahe (2000), target population refers to the population that the researcher will ideally like to generalize. Sarantakos (2005) also maintains that target population refers to the empirical units such as persons, objects, occurrences, etc. used for the study. The target population is the group of interest to the researcher. It is the group from whom the researcher would like to generalize the results of the study. The target population of the study comprised 496 teachers from three (3) selected circuits in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. Within the three circuits, the researcher targeted only teachers at the pre-school level.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample for the study was 217 participants from various schools. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table with its appropriate confidence level and confidence interval on a population of 496. Amedahe (2000) postulates that sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population. He further asserted that a sample denotes a small and representative proportion of the population. Sampling enables the researcher to study a relatively small number of units in place of the target population and to obtain data that is representative of the whole population (Sarantakos, 2005).

Seven schools were purposively selected from the ten (10) Basic Schools in the Kassena Nankana Municipality for the study. Simple random was used to make sure any circuit, school and individual stand the chance to be selected for the study. According to Yates, David and Daren (2008), in simple random sampling each individual is chosen randomly and entirely by chance, such that each individual has the same probability of being chosen at any stage during the sampling process, and each subset of population individuals has the same probability of being chosen the sample in any study These schools were selected based on the fact that they are all public schools that are less restrictive to the study and at the same time teachers are readily available.

Purposively, preschools were selected for the study. The sampling procedure decision was based on the fact that the study was about early childhood developmental practices. I used purposively sampling because I was working with only preschool teachers and no other teachers from any educational category. According to Black (2010), purposive sampling technique in which a researcher relies on his or her own judgment when members of population to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs where elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher.

3.6   Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a four-point Likert scaled questionnaire with their appropriate numerical values. The scale of the questionnaire was Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3,and negative ones were Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

The questionnaire was used to gather information from the preschool teachers in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), the questionnaire is widely used and is useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured and unstructured numerical data that can be administered without the researcher, May (2001) also maintains that the purpose of the survey questionnaire is to elicit information about the characteristics or opinions of the participants. The questionnaire has the advantages of allowing the researcher to collect data from a group of participants at the same and it is easy to score.

The questionnaires were designed for teachers at the early childhood level. The questionnaires elicited demographic data, the perceived knowledge of teachers on early childhood best recommended practices, teachers perceive the implementation of early childhood educational best recommended practices, the perceived challenges in the implementation to early childhood educational best practices and finally, how early childhood educational practices issues be addressed or managed. The items in the questionnaire were structured in such a way that they enabled the participants to pick alternative answers against their choice of responses. Questionnaire for participants comprised four segments respectively. Section 'A' elicited the bio-data of the participants. Section 'B' covered the first research question which considered items regarding the perceived knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best recommended practices. Section 'C' also looked at teachers perceives the implementation of early childhood educational best recommended practices. Section 'D' took care of the perceived challenges in the implementation to early childhood educational best practices and finally the last section considered how early childhood educational practices issues be addressed or managed.

3.6.1 Validation of Instrument

In quantitative research, validity rests on the foundation that a method, a test or a research tool is actually measuring what it is supposed to measure (Bryman, 2008). In a similar manner, Silverman (2009) stated that validity is a way of finding an accurate representation of the phenomena to which they refer to. Reliability is a measure of the consistency over time of instruments with groups of participants and it deals with precision and accuracy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Validity and reliability are essential features of any research (Creswell, 2003; Robson, 2002).

Validity is essential for evaluating the quality and acceptability of research. Generally, researchers use different instruments to collect data. Therefore, the quality of these instruments is very critical because the conclusions researchers draw is based on the information they obtain using these instruments (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Thus, it is imperative that the data and the instruments to be validated. To ensure the face validity of the research instruments used, the questionnaire was constructed with close consultation with the supervisor to help eliminate or revise unclear and obscure questions while rewording complex items. Content validity of the questionnaire was obtained by presenting them to two professional people, including the researcher's supervisor because content and construct validity are determined by expert judgment (Punch, 2008).

3.6.2 Pilot Testing of the Instrument

A piloting of the instrument was carried out on 40 pre-school teachers in the Kassena Nankana West District. These schools were excluded from the study. The aim of the pilot testing was to improve the validity and reliability of the instruments. The participants were given draft copies of the questionnaire. The participants of the pilot

test were asked to complete the questionnaires and to provide comments or suggestions for revising any ambiguous items. They were also told to discuss frankly with the researcher any ambiguity, incoherence or incomprehension that they experience about any aspect of the draft questionnaire. The final instruments for the study were produced after subsequent revisions in the wording of a few items. The reliability of the instrument was .075. This is within the normal range (Field, 2005).

3.7   Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the Head of Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba. The letter spelled out the purpose of the study, the need for individual participation, anonymity as well as confidentially of participants' response. After establishing the necessary contact with the head teachers of the selected schools, permission was sought for the administration of the instrument.

Again, the researcher trained two research assistants for the collection of the data. These assistants were trained on how to talk to participants, how to explain certain difficult questions to participants and other equally important information that enabled the researcher to have uniform information. The researcher together with the assistants explained the purpose of the study and procedure for responding to the questionnaire to participants. In order to ensure clarity of how the questionnaire could be completed, the researcher together with the assistants again administered the questionnaire themselves participants personally during regular school time. The researcher and assistants used (3) three weeks to distribute and collect the answered questionnaires.

3.8   Data Analysis

The research data collected was very extensive and was analysed using quantitative methods. Patton (1990) notes, "the analysis of the empirical data aims to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals" (p. 371). The field data was collated, sifted through and edited in order to address questions that have been answered partially or not answered. For effective statistical presentation and analysis, the questionnaires were serially numbered to facilitate easy identification. It is necessary to observe this precaution to ensure quick detection of tiny sources of errors when they occur in the tabulation of the data. Responses to the various items in the questionnaires were then added, tabulated and statistically analysed.

After editing and coding, the data was entered into the computer using the Statistical Product and service solution (SPSS Version 22.0) software. Before performing the desired data transformation, the data was cleaned by running consistency checks on every variable. Corrections were made after verification from the questionnaires.

For research question one, two three and four descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data to describe simple characteristics and research variables. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical and nominal data and means standard deviations were used for interval or ration data. Data from the teachers was analysed based on the research questions as follows.

3.8   Ethical Considerations

Punch (2008) was of the opinion that researchers should be mindful of ethical issues especially in social research because it is concerned with data about people.

Consideration for moral issues and respect for participants is essential in social research. Hence, in this research, several ethical issues were taken into consideration. The research addressed all ethical concerns which include informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

The anonymity of study participants was also highly taken into consideration in the present study. Oliver (2010) pointed out that anonymity is a vital issue in research ethics because it gives the participants the opportunity to have their identity concealed. In this research, fictitious names were used for identification purposes which cannot be traced to the participants. Codes were also adopted where necessary to ensure anonymity of information and harm. In order not to unnecessarily invade the privacy of participants, the researcher made prior visits to schools before the data collection commenced. Neither names nor any identifiable information from participants was taken as a way of ensuring the ethical principle of anonymity in social research. This is to prevent possible victimization of participants where certain responses may be viewed as unpalatable to other stakeholders.

On the issue of confidentiality, efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of the responses of the participants. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one known to them would have access to the information provided and none of the respondent's names were recorded in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0   Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the pre-schools teachers' perception on recommended practices in early childhood educational in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The analysis is based on the 100% returned data obtained from 217 selected pre-school teachers in the Kassena Nankana Municipality.

4.1   Demographic Representation of Participants

4.1.1   Sex of participants

The sex status of the participants was examined. This was to find out how many participants were males and females. Figure 1 presents the findings.
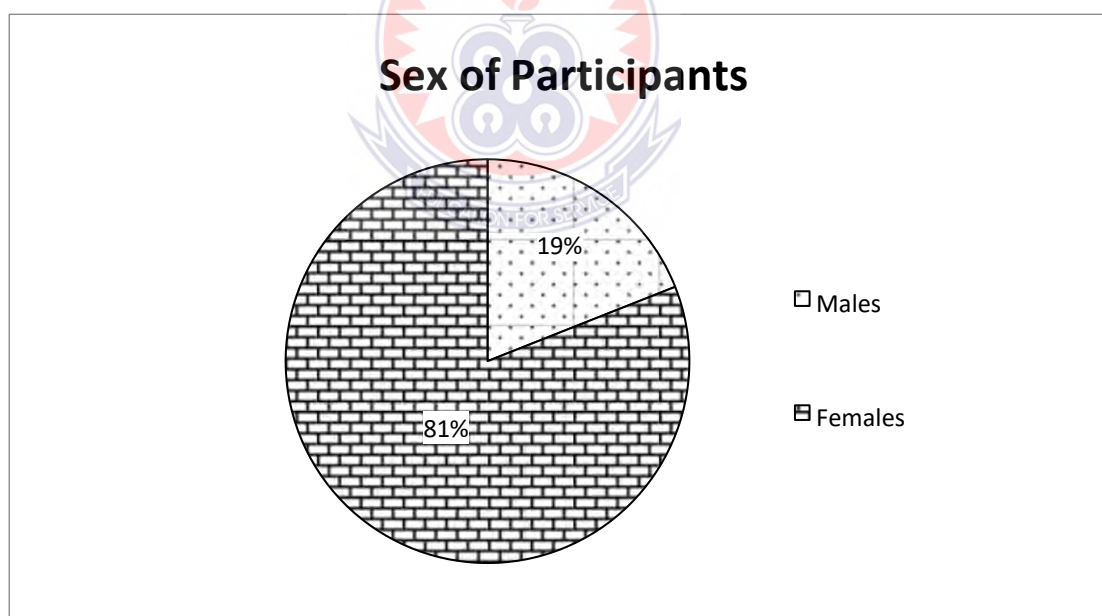
Figure 1: Sex of Participants
Source: Field Data (2023)

It can be seen that 176(81%) of the participants were females as compared to 41(19%) out of the 217 participants which were males. It is concluded that majority of the participants who responded in the study were females.

47

4.1.2 Age of participants

Table 1: Age of Participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29	38	18
30-39	49	23
40-49	74	34
50 and above	56	25
Total	**217**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2023)

From Table 1 it can be seen that quite a high percentage of the participants were within the age groups 40-49 which is 74(34%), 50 and above 56(25%), 30-39 which is 49(23%) and 20-29 which represents 38(18%) respectively. It is clear here that majority of the participants therefore fall within the productive (working) age population.

4.1.3 Educational background of participants

Table 2: Educational Levels of the participants

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary/elementary	0	0
Secondary	0	0
Tertiary	217	100
No formal education	0	0
Total	**217**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2023)

48

Table 2 indicates that all the teachers have acquired tertiary training and qualify to teach at the early grade.

4.1.4 Teaching experience of participants

Table 3: Teaching Experience of Participants

Teaching experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-10 years	56	26
11-20 years	109	50
21-30	35	16
31 above	17	8
Total	**217**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2023)

It can be seen in Table 3 that participants falling within 1-10 years working experience were 56(267%), the years of 10-20 working experience were 109(50%), again, participants within the years of 21-30 working experience were 35(16%) and 31 and above working experience were only 17(8%). This indicates that most of the participants fall within 11-20 years working experience.

4.2   Analysis of Research Questions

4.2.1   Research Question One: What are the level of knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality?

To materialize the purpose of the study, means and standard deviations were computed for the responses of the teachers with regards to perceived knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best recommended practices. Table 3 presents the findings.

49

Table 4:   Descriptive Analysis of Level of Knowledge Preschool Teachers Have on
Early Childhood Educational Best Practices

Perceived Knowledge Preschool Teachers Have on Early Childhood Educational Best Recommended Practices	N	Mean	Std. D
ECE best recommended practices take into consideration children's individual differences	217	3.25	.437
ECE best recommended practices take into consideration children's in interest	217	3.33	.471
ECE best recommended practices rest on the idea that children's select their own activities	217	3.46	.500
ECE best recommended practices provide a variety of concrete learning materials in centres (writing centre, science centre, math centre, etc.)	217	3.34	.796
ECE best recommended practices allow children to learn by actively exploring relevant and interesting materials.	217	3.21	.408
ECE best recommended practices allow for children to learn by interacting and working cooperatively with other children	217	3.22	.413
ECE best recommended practices allow teachers to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions,	217	3.46	.500
ECE best recommended practices allow children to establish rules for their classroom	217	3.79	.408
ECE best recommended practices allow children to have stories read to them daily, individually or in groups.	217	3.37	.403
Means Of Means/SD	**217**	**3.37**	**.426**

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 4 presents the perceived knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood

educational best recommended practices. From the Table, the overall mean and

standard deviation (M=3.37, SD=.426) show that majority of the were aware and have

knowledge about the early childhood educational best recommended practices. To

illustrate few of the statements, the majority of teachers indicated that ECE best

practice takes into consideration children's individual differences. The mean and

standard deviation of (M=3.25, SD=.437) confirm the foregoing statement.

50

The findings further show that majority of the pre-school teachers (M=3.33, SD=.471) are knowledgeable and aware that ECE best practice is the one that takes into consideration children's in interest. The findings lend support to the work of Bredekamp (2011) who posited that teachers need to meet the children where they are. This involves observing children's engagement with materials, activities, and planning curriculum and adapting teaching strategies based on observation, assessing what children already know and their interests, and keeping teaching goals in mind.

The results again show that majority of the pre-teachers have the knowledge that ECE best practice allows teachers to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions. The teachers' responses to that statement produced a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.46, SD=.500) to confirm it. The findings are consistent with of Morrison (2007) who also revealed that in ECE best practice there is the need for a fully competent individual child having the skills and knowledge of dealing with the new world's demands, changes in the family units.

On the issue of whether pre-school teachers are aware that ECE best practice allows children to establish rules for their classroom, the mean and standard deviation of (M=3.79, SD=.408) gives statistical evidence that majority of the pre-school teachers agreed totally to the statement. This study corroborates the findings of Webb (2003) who elaborated that ECE practice pay way for children to learn cooperative skills through education in child care centres and such skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in the society.

4.2.2 Research Question Two: To what extent do preschool teachers use the best practices in the Municipality?

The researcher went further to explore m the teachers whether they put in practice the early childhood educational best recommended practices. To achieve this, means and standard deviation were deemed appropriate for the analysis.

Table 5: *Extent to which Preschool Teachers Use the Best Practices in Early Childhood Education*

Teachers use of Early Childhood Educational Best Recommended Practices	N	Mean	Std. D
I cater for all aspects of the development in teaching	217	1.28	.257
I promote a positive climate for teaching and learning	217	2.03	.271
I use a variety of teaching strategies in teaching	217	1.06	.300
I assess and evaluate children's learning progress primarily through observation, check lists, work samples as part of their classroom assessment	217	1.14	.496
I provide a safe environment and age-appropriate supervision that allows for children to become responsible	217	2.01	.298
I use enough teaching and learning materials	217	1.22	.323
Means of Means/SD	**217**	**1.27**	**.226**

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 5 presents how preschool put into practice the early childhood educational best recommended practices. The results show that even though the majority of the teachers are aware of the early childhood educational best practices they seem not to put them into practice. The overall mean and standard deviation (M=1.27, SD=.226) which is less than 2.50 supports the findings. For example, to find out the pre-school teachers use of all aspects of the childhood development in teaching, the mean and standard deviation (M=1.28, SD=.257) shows that most of the teachers do not use all of them. The findings agree with of Hart, et al., (2003) whose study revealed that

there was a negative correlation between developmentally inappropriate practices and pupil's outcome.

The Table further shows that majority of the pre-school teachers do not use a variety of teaching strategies. This was evident after the teacher's responses produced a mean and standard deviation (M=1.06, SD=.300) which is less than the test value of 2.50.

To further explore from the teachers whether pre-school teachers provide a safe environment and age- appropriate supervision that allows for children to increasing responsibility, the results show that majority of the teachers indicated that they do not provide a safe environment and age- appropriate supervision that allows for children to be responsible. The mean and standard deviation of (M=2.01, SD=298) gives statistical evidence to that effect.

The findings are in conformity with that Bredekamp and Copple (1997) and Buchanan et al., (1998) who argued that teaching practices for young children include opportunities for choice, hands-on learning, promotion of collaboration between children, use of a variety of teaching strategies, individualization, and self-regulation, however, most teachers do not engage pupils in these activities and such they are not able to teach pupils to unearth their potentials.

4.2.3 Research Question Three: What are the barriers in the implementation of early childhood educational best practices in the Municipality?

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the researcher further explored from the teachers some barriers in the implementation of early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. To find out this, descriptive statistics using means and standards deviations were computed for the responses of the teachers.

Table 6:   Descriptive Analysis about Barriers in the Implementation of Early Childhood Educational Best Practices

Barriers in the Implementation of Early Childhood educational best practices	N	Means	Std.D
Lack of parental support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.54	.500
Inadequate teaching and learning materials challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.20	.403
Lack of curriculum materials challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.25	.437
Lack of pupils readiness challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices			
Inadequate government support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.00	.300
Inadequate government support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices moral responsibility in my entire life in the society	217	3.25	.437
The negative attitudes of school heads challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.22	.413
Inadequate school facilities challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices	217	3.78	.413
Mean of Means/SD	**217**	**3.22**	**.413**

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 6 presents the descriptive analysis (means and standard deviation) on the challenges in the implementation to early childhood educational best recommended practices. To achieve the purpose of the study, I further went on and assessed factors that challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best recommended practices. The results show that there are many factors that hinder the implementation to early childhood educational best recommended practices. The pre-school teacher's responses produced a mean and standard deviation (M=3.22, SD=.413) showing that majority of the teachers aligned with the pre-coded items that they were responsible

factors that challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best recommended practices.

On the statement "lack of parental support challenge, the implementation of early childhood educational best recommended practices" the mean and standard deviation (M=3.54, SD=.500) shows that majority of the teachers agreed that parents do not support the smooth running of the childhood educational best recommended practices. The results further show that inadequate teaching and learning materials challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best recommended practices. The mean and standard deviation (M=3.20, SD=.403) gives ample evidence to that fact. The findings disagree with of Morrison (2008) who also found out that parents who involve themselves in school activities help in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. Similarity, Lilley (2007) postulated parents who share ideas and feelings with teachers accommodate more guidance to the teachers about their children and this helps in successful implementation of the early childhood curriculum.

Lack of curriculum materials was also identified as one challenge of the implementation of early childhood educational best recommended practices. The mean and standard deviation (M=3.54; SD=.500) shows that majority of the teachers agreed that lack of curriculum materials pose a challenge in the implementation to early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The findings are in conformity with the work of Ntumi (2016) who revealed that teachers, teaching and learning materials are the main factors that influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0   Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the study as well as the conclusions, recommendations, and directions for further research. Thus, the chapter focuses on the implications of the findings from the study for policy formulation and further research. The recommendations are made based on the key findings and major conclusions arising from the study.

5.1   Summary of the Study

The study assessed knowledge and practice of preschool teachers about early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study employed quantitative approaches through the use of self-developed questionnaires.

The pre-schools teachers participated in the study via responding to the questionnaire. In all, there were 217 participants. Quantitative data analysis was performed using the Statistical Products and Service Solutions (SPSS), Version 23.0). In relation to the quantitative data, both descriptive (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistical (independent samples t -test) tools were used in order to analyse the data, and also answer the research questions and hypothesis.

5.2   Summary of Main Findings

5.2.1   Research Question One: What are the levels of knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality?

The main purpose of research question one was to determine the level of knowledge preschool teachers have on early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The results from the study revealed that preschool teachers are aware of and have knowledge about early childhood educational best recommended practices. Best recommended practices such as ECE consider children's individual differences, children's in interest, ECE rest on the idea that children's to select their own activities, ECE provide a variety of concrete learning materials in centres (writing centre, science centre, math centre, etc.), ECE allows children to learn by actively exploring relevant and interesting materials were all indicated by teachers that they are knowledgeable in those best recommended practices.

5.2.2   Research Question Two: To what extent do preschool teachers use the best practices in the Municipality?

Research question two sought to determine the extent to which preschool teachers use these early childhood educational best practices. The results from the study unravelled that even though pre-school teachers have knowledge about the early best recommended practices, however, they do not apply or implement them in the classroom. For example teachers indicated that they do not emphasise all aspect of development in teaching, not promoting of positive climate for teaching and learning was also identified, teachers again indicated that they do not do variety of teaching strategies and more importantly they do not provide a safe environment and age-appropriate supervision that allows for children to increasing responsibility.

5.2.3   Research Question Three: What are the barriers in the implementation of early childhood educational best practices in the Municipality?

Research question three explored from the pre-school teachers some factors that challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. Identified challenges include the lack of parental support, inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of curriculum materials, lack of pupils readiness, Inadequate school facilities, Inadequate government support and attitudes of school heads.

5.3   Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded there is a gap between theory and practice in teaching skills among the preschool teachers in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The findings give reasons to believe that there is a need to engage teachers in critical reflection in action of what they know. This can be done by strengthening and facilitating professional development training to enhance the teacher's lesson delivery and provide an avenue for them to initiate discussions on what works or does not work for them in reality.

5.4   Recommendations

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

1. In the first place, it is recommended that the Directorate of Education should provide teachers with comprehensive training and awareness on the contextual implementation of the early childhood best recommended practices within a culturally relevant context.

2. Again, the Directorate of Education should ensure the developmental goals and objectives in the curriculum reflect local values and inform approaches to

classroom practices. The curriculum should also reflect the customary practices, traditions, and rituals that touch the lives of children in various cultural contexts and encourage the participation of children in the everyday life of their community.

3. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Directorate of Education in collaboration with the Early Childhood departments in schools, provide hands-on practice to in-service teachers so that they can translate child development principles to classroom practice. The model could include offering short courses with a multilevel approach which leads to a systematic professional development.

4. Principals must ensure that teachers are provided with continuous training on how children develop and equip them with the best ways of observing and listening to children. This can be done by affording them release time to attend workshops or observe other teachers and classrooms.

5. The government should establish an electronic inter-school database network in all of Ghana in which all early childhood teachers can exchange ideas, lesson plans, and activities, discuss similar areas of concern, and post videos documenting classroom best recommended practices. Finally, parents must be sensitised and encouraged to be fully involved in the education of their wards.

5.5   Suggestions for Further Research

From the overall recommendations which have been under listed in this research report, it is recommended that other academic research exercises could be directed around the topic. The following are some suggested areas that can be considered for further studies.

1. The researcher suggests that similar studies should be conducted in other Metropolis/Municipalities/Districts in the other regions in the country, this is to help make a concrete generalization of the findings.

2. Further research can concentrate on the higher classes. For example lower and upper primary to examine teachers knowledge and practice of the subject matter.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS

Dear Respondent

The purpose of this study is to find out perceptions of preschool teachers about early childhood educational best practices in Kassena Nankana Municipality. Please respond to the statements as truthfully and honestly as you can. Be assured that whatever information you provide will be treated as confidential. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

INSTRUCTION: Tick (√) the appropriate box and supply information in the space provided where necessary.

1. Age Range: a. 18 - 29 years [ ]   b. 30 - 39 years [ ]
                         c. 40 - 49 years [ ]   d. 50 and above [ ]

2. Sex: a. Male [ ]   b. Female [ ]

3. Marital Status: a. Single [ ]   b. Married [ ]
                         c. Separated [ ]   d. Divorced   [ ]
                         e. Widowed [ ]

4. Educational Level: a. No Formal Education [ ]   b. Primary/Elementary [ ]
                         c. Secondary [ ]   d. Tertiary [ ]

5. Teaching Experience: a. Below 6 years [ ]   b. 6-10 years [ ]
                         c. Above 10 years [ ]

SECTION B: **PERCEIVED KNOWLEDGE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS HAVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL BEST PRACTICES**

Instruction: In the tables below for each statement mark how much you agree with a tick (√) in the box to the right of each statement. The responses are on the scale **1-4,** where **1** = Strongly Disagree **[SD], 2** = Disagree **[D], 3** = Agree **[A]** and **4** = Strongly Agree **[SA].**

STATEMENTS	SD	D	A	SA
6. ECE best recommended practices take into consideration children's individual differences				
7. ECE best recommended practices take into consideration children's in interest				
8. ECE best recommended practices rest on the idea that children's to select their own activities				
9. ECE best recommended practices provide a variety of concrete learning materials in centres (writing centre, science centre, math centre, etc.)				
10. ECE best recommended practices allow children to learn by actively exploring relevant and interesting materials.				
11. ECE best recommended practices allow for children to learn by interacting and working cooperatively with other children				
12. ECE best recommended practices allow teachers to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions,				
13. ECE best recommended practices allow children to establish rules for their classroom				
14. ECE best recommended practices allow children to have stories read to them daily, individually or in groups.				

72

SECTION C: EXTENT TO WHICH PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS USE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Instruction: In the tables below for each statement mark how much you agree with a tick (√) in the box to the right of each statement. The responses are on the scale **1-4,** where **1** = Strongly Disagree **[SD], 2** = Disagree **[D], 3** = Agree **[A]** and **4** = Strongly Agree **[SA].**

STATEMENTS	SD	D	A	SA
15. I use all aspect of the development in teaching				
16. I promote a positive climate for teaching and learning				
17. I use a variety of teaching strategies				
18. I assess and evaluate children's learning progress primarily through observation, check lists, work samples as part of their classroom assessment				
19. I provide a safe environment and age- appropriate supervision that allows for children to increasing responsibility				
20. I use enough teaching and learning materials				

SECTION D: PERCEIVED BARRIERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Instruction: In the tables below for each statement mark how much you agree with a tick (√) in the box to the right of each statement. The responses are on the scale **1-4,** where **1** = Strongly Disagree **[SD], 2** = Disagree **[D], 3** = Agree **[A]** and **4** = Strongly Agree **[SA].**

STATEMENTS	SD	D	A	SA
21. Lack of parental support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
22. Inadequate teaching and learning materials challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
23. Lack of Curriculum materials challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
24. Lack of pupils readiness challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
25. Inadequate government support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
26. Inadequate government support challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices moral responsibility in my entire life in the society				
27. The attitudes of school heads challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
28. Inadequate school facilities challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				
29. Teacher attitudes challenge the implementation to early childhood educational best practices				

THANK YOU