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Tthe roles of Early Childhood Teachers in integrating Play in the Teaching and Learning process at the Ga West Municipality

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THE ROLES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN INTEGRATING PLAY IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS AT THE GA WEST MUNICIPALITY

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A dissertation in the Department of Early Grade Education, Faculty of Applied Behavioural Sciences in Education, submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education (Early Childhood Education) in the University of Education, Winneba.

SEPTEMBER, 2024

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

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

SIGNATURE: …………………………….

DATE: ………………………………….

Supervisor's Declaration

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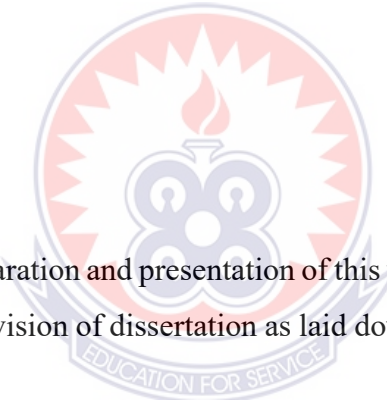
MRS. JUSTINA ADU

Signature: …………………………

Date: ………………………………

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DEDICATION

To my children Bernard N. N Nortey, Gloria Naa Shormey Nortey, Gerald N. N Nortey and Audrey Sedinam Ahiafor.

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First and foremost, God almighty. I want to thank my supervisor Mrs Justina Adu, for her continuous guidance, encouragement, and expertise. I am grateful for the knowledge and skills I have gained under her mentorship. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Gyedu. Again, I am grateful to Mr and Mrs Quartey, Mr Daniel Nortey, lng. Moses Arkoh, Miss Blessing Essaba, Staff of Fountain of Wisdom Academy and my siblings for the collective efforts and support of everyone involved in this project work. Lastly, I am deeply grateful Mr. Hans Obeng Mensah who have been actively involved in this project. Thank you all for your valuable contributions and for making this project a fulfilling and enriching experience.
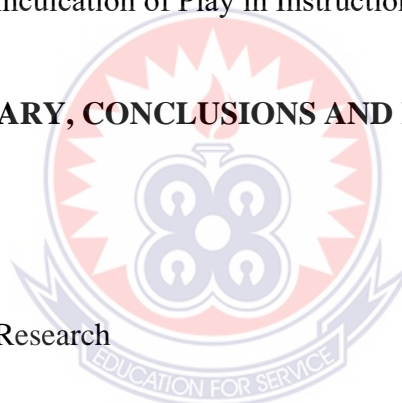
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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess the role of early childhood teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction in the Ga West Metropolis. The pragmatic research paradigm was used for this study whereas the mixed methods research approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed for the study. Thus, questionnaires and interview guides were used as data collection instruments. A sample size of 25 teachers were selected for the study. The findings revealed that teachers in the Ga West Metropolis are supported to inculcate play in teaching pre-school pupils by providing play materials, supervision of teachers, training and education of teachers as well as motivation of teachers. Again, it was found that play activities employed by teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction included integration of games and songs in the classroom learning activities and engaging children in outdoor play activities. However, it was found that some challenges that limit teachers in the use of play in their teaching processes are; inadequate in-service training, limited play materials, unavailability of play space and centres. It was recommended that early childhood centres should be allocated sufficient time in the timetable for children to engage in play activities. Time allocated for play activities should not be used for teaching other subjects. Also, teachers in the pre-school should improvise in making available some play or instructional materials needed in play activities during instruction and head teachers should strengthen their supervision and monitoring roles to motivate teachers to use play activities effectively in teaching.
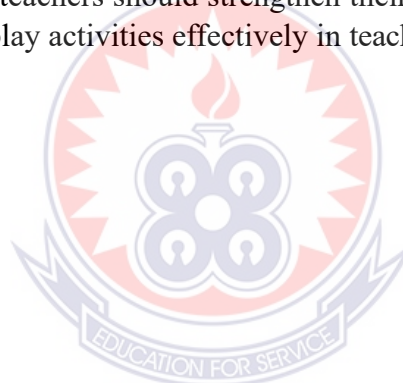
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Early childhood education plays a significant and a pivotal role in the lives of young children and there is consistent empirical evidence that high quality early childhood education programmes can contribute to children's short-term and long-term gains in cogitative, language and social emotional development (National Association for the Education of Young Children,

Governments are increasingly focusing on early childhood education with legislative policies and strategies being directed at the accessibility to quality early childhood education learning experiences. Such moves are motivated by research findings that preschool programmes can contribute to a child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development (including language, perception, reasoning and memory) (Schweinhart & Weikert, 2016: Barnet, 2018; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Alakeson, 2004; Education Commission of the States, 2006; Bowman, Donovan & Burns 2001; Wood, 2007). The New Zealand government for instance, divide in 1990 that a national early childhood curriculum was to be developed, which eventually led to the introduction of Te Whariki in 2014 (Minister of Education, 2014) with the aspirations for children to grow up as competent learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.

The early years of human life provides a unique opportunity for social and cognitive investment, but at the same time this is the most vulnerable period for all forms of stunting in development if holistic development is not nurtured. Froebel (1987) writing on children's play and teachers' involvement in play activities have received recognition and attention by philosophers and educationist for centuries (Aikem, 2013).

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Play has had an important and continues to be relevant in contemporary early childhood educational practices. In an era where play is presented as one of the most potent instruments of teaching and learning at the early childhood level, insights into how play is used relative to the child's environment is critical to every successful early childhood educational programme. In addition to being recognized as a vehicle for learning, play is described as a context in which children can demonstrate their own learning and help scaffold the learning of others (Akhusama, 2015).

Play activities is essential in every teaching and learning process at the pre-school level. Research gives ample evidence that children who engage in play benefit in areas such as developing social interactions, exposure to social interaction and abstract thought (Bodrova & Leong, 2013). Vygotsky (1996) affirms that play as purpose. That purpose being to allow children to form connections between their own actions and realizations and the objects to which they give significant meaning. Play is a form of activity that may be encouraged through emerging social interaction and helps children give meaning to events that they experience in their daily lives as they grow. Play facilitates children's ability to improve and acquire social interaction schemes and language skills, such as labeling through abstract through, role assignment, developing conversation skills, and imaginative story-telling. Imaginative and make-believe play are concepts that develop gradually as children grow (Bodrova & Leong, 2013).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistant Committee (OECD / DAC, 2008), play is so important to optimal child development. To affirm the assertion of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/ Development Assistant Committee (DAC), Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008) stated that play and learning are inextricably intertwined because play is a vital component in learning. Children are always learning when playing, but not necessarily learning what the adults want

them to. While it is generally accepted that play is in danger of being displaced in school curriculum due to the pressure of school readiness and a lack of understanding of the role of play in children's learning (Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011).

In Ghana, learning through play has been seen regularly as the most versatile way a child can learn since time immemorial. The development of Early childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ghana has undergone a number of major changes over the years. The broad goal of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy in Ghana is to promote the survival, growth, and development of all children aged zero to eight years, to ensure improved standard of living and enhance quality of life for families in Ghana (ECCD, 2002; Nyarko & Addo, 2013).

In 2007, Ghana's government became the first in Sub-Sahara African country to expand to 2 years of pre-primary education called Kindergarten (KG) in free and compulsory basic education provided by the state (Bidwell, Watine & Perry, 2014). While access is now high, quality early childhood education with the government curriculum (Bidwell, Watine & Perry, 2014). Current curricula have also adopted a play approach to lesson delivery, not only to enhance the gross and large motor skills of the children, but also due to the realization that children learn best through play (Baffour-Awuah, 2011).

However, early childhood educators are faced with expanded academic expectations that have forced them to limit the use of play in the classroom today (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The play period is often too short and is generally underutilised by teachers in the implementation of curriculum. Play has been overlooked as a valuable learning resource in classrooms in the majority of pre-school classrooms in Ghana (Baffour-Awuah, 2011). The situation of early childhood education centres at Ga West Municipality of Ghana is not different. For this reason, this study focused on eulogizing the need of play in teaching and learning and the role of early

childhood heads and teachers in the immense integration of play in teaching and learning at the preschool level.

A considerable number of studies that have explored play's developmental potential in the early years of life, relied generally in observations of children's play enhances their learning development via the lenses of preschool and kindergarten teachers. Thus, examining Ghanaian preschool and kindergarten teacher's beliefs, role and barriers about play will add another dimension to this area of research and provide a more thorough understanding of the usefulness of play for children's learning and development across domains in school/educational settings in Ghana. It is expected that early childhood education in Ghana focuses on learning through play in teaching pre-school children should be guided by creating a play based learning environment which includes providing a safe space, correct supervision and culturally aware trained teachers who are knowledgeable about early year's foundation (Tamakloe, Atta & Amedahe, 2005). Early childhood educators need to desist from using more of the contact hours on academic activities rather than facilitate play among children.

In school settings, I expect teachers to be trained to gently guide play, use play-based teaching and learning activities to promote curricular goals while maintaining the critically important aspects of play such as children's intrinsic motivation to engage in play (Tamakloe, Atta & Amedahe, 2005). Play in the classroom or outside the classroom whether free or guided play fosters improvements in such subjects as mathematics language, early literacy and socio-emotional skills and it does so for children from both low and higher-income environments (Duncan & Luck, 2008). Therefore, the researcher foresees early childhood school heads and teacher who are enthused to ensuring all barriers of play inculcation in teaching and learning is resolved in Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Early childhood education is a critical period for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Within this context, the integration of play in the teaching and learning process has been widely acknowledged as essential for holistic child development (Ginsburg, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). However, despite the recognized benefits of play-based learning, there exists a gap in understanding the specific roles of early childhood teachers in effectively integrating play within the educational framework (Nicolopoulou et al., 2006). This research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics and challenges faced by early childhood teachers in the Ga West Municipality as they navigate the terrain of play-based pedagogies.

Early childhood teachers play a pivotal role in shaping young minds and fostering a love for learning through playful exploration (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). However, the effective integration of play into the Standard based curriculum (2020) requires a deep understanding of its pedagogical significance and the ability to create a conducive environment for play to flourish (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2013). Despite the growing body of research highlighting the positive outcomes of play-based learning, there is a lack of comprehensive studies focusing on the specific roles, challenges, and strategies employed by early childhood teachers in the Ga West Municipality to integrate play into their teaching practices (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

One of the pressing issues facing early childhood teachers is the balancing act between play-based learning and meeting academic standards set by educational authorities (Christie & Roskos, 2013). The pressure to cover prescribed syllabi often leads to a reduction in playtime and a shift towards more didactic teaching methods (Bergen, 2017). This shift raises concerns about the potential impact on children's holistic development, particularly in terms of creativity, problem-solving skills, and social-emotional competence (Holland & Frost, 2010). Understanding the challenges faced by teachers in navigating these competing demands is

crucial for designing effective interventions that promote a balanced approach to early childhood education.

Furthermore, the availability and accessibility of resources for play-based learning in early childhood classrooms pose significant challenges (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Many teachers in the Ga West Municipality lack access to age-appropriate materials, outdoor play spaces, and professional development opportunities focused on play-based pedagogies (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). These resource constraints not only limit the quality of play experiences provided to children but also place additional burdens on teachers to improvise and adapt their teaching methods (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Investigating the resource-related challenges faced by early childhood teachers is crucial for advocating for improved support systems and resource allocation in early childhood education settings.

In addition to resource constraints, cultural perceptions of play and its role in education may influence how early childhood teachers approach play-based learning (Holland & Frost, 2010). In some communities, play is viewed as frivolous and incompatible with academic rigor, leading to a devaluation of its importance in educational settings (Nicolopoulou et al., 2006). These cultural attitudes can create barriers for teachers seeking to integrate play into their teaching practices and may impact the overall effectiveness of play-based learning initiatives (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Understanding the cultural contexts within which early childhood teachers operate is essential for developing culturally responsive approaches to play-based education.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to assess the role of early childhood teachers and teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. The specific objectives of the study were to:

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1. Assess the play activities teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana engage learners in during instructions

2. Examine how teachers support teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana in the use of play in instructions.

3. Find out the barriers to the inculcation of play in instructions among teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana.

4. Investigate the views of teachers and teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana on improving the inculcation of play in instructions.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What play activities do teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana engage learners in during instruction?

2. How are teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana supported in the use of play in instruction?

3. What are the barriers to the inculcation of play in instruction among teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana?

4. What are the views of teachers and teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana on improving the inculcation of paly in instruction?

1.5 Significance of the Study

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

cooperation, as well as an understanding of symbolic representation and social behaviour. This study will provide learners in the selected schools the chance of enhancing their creativity and imagination through play. As children play, they learn how to get along with others, communicate with peers and how to solve problems.

This research will equip the Government of Ghana, Ministry of Education, Curriculum Developers and other stakeholders with relevant information on the level of play inculcation in instruction at the Ga West Municipality. They will be provided with the information on the challenges faced by teachers in their quest to ensure play inculcation in instruction. This study will also provide useful information to Directors of Education, School Heads, SISO and Teachers, especially those in the pre-school level, who think teaching pre-school learners is only meant to be abstract teaching in the classroom so that they will accept and adopt the use of play activities as method of teaching. It will enable pupils to explore the natural environment and deepen their understanding of topics taught in the classroom. It will provide information to teachers to enable them know the relevance of play activities to the holistic development of learners.

Also, the finding of this study will be a source of reference material for teachers, students, stakeholders and the general public in any other study which would be related to this study. Findings from this study will be useful to the Department of Social Welfare, which has a mandate to run day care centres together with the Ministry of Education, in planning how to equip pre-primary school teachers that may contribute useful knowledge on policy formulation for the teaching/learning of the young children. The study findings may also highlight gaps in research that may prompt the need for further investigation.

1.6 Delimitation

The study was delimited to KG 1 and 2 teachers of the selected early childhood education centres in the Ga West Municipality. The study allowed the participation of early childhood teachers selected from different early childhood centres at different locations in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. This study focused on only the inculcation of play in teaching and learning of pre-school children to enhance their development and academic performance. This study involved early childhood teachers' perspectives on the four aspects of play, namely definitions of play; benefits of play; role of teachers in promoting learning through play; and the obstacles to using play to promote children's learning.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Barriers: IT refers to obstacles that prevent the smooth inculcation of play in teaching and learning at early childhood centres at the Ga West Municipality of Ghana.

Early Childhood School Heads: It is an individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating a child care, preschool or kindergarten programme and all activities of early childcare centres at Ga West Municipality of Ghana.

Play materials – Anything natural or artificial/improvised, props, or loose parts, which a child or a teacher can use for fantasy or recreation, inside or outside class.

Play: It is a vital experience through which children learn social, conceptual and creative skills, as well as increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world around them either on their own or guided by a teacher at an early childhood centre at the Ga West Municipality of Ghana.

Play instruction – the use of play in teaching children.

Teaching Strategy – Teaching method or technique which a pre-primary school teacher uses to introduce a new concept or reinforce a concept.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is an instructional practice that is grounded in research that promotes and nurtures the optimal educational development of young children, as designed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

1.8 Organization of the Study

Chapter two entails reviewed literature related to the study. Chapter three is about the methodology used for the study which included the research design, population, sampling procedures, data collection instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis. Chapter four has the presentation and analysis of results and discussion of the findings. Chapter five is a summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendation of the study.
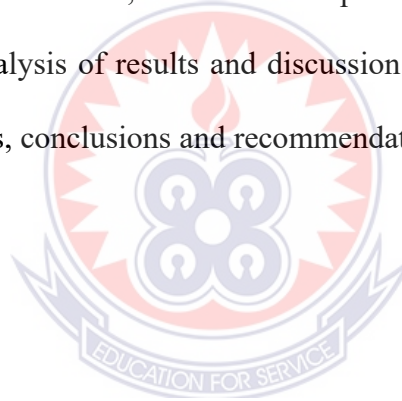
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Literature review is a systematic identification, location, scrutiny and summary of related published works to gain information about the research topic (Galvan, 2006). Literature review provided essential background knowledge about similarities and differences between the present study and prior research studies done which are relevant to the topic in this study (Galvan, 2006). The following is an outline of the areas reviewed in the ensuring literature:

1. Theoretical Review

2. Conceptual Review

3. Empirical Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Early childhood education experts agree that the early years are a crucial learning time for children as they develop their cognitive, emotional, physical and social faculties and skills (Katz, 2015). What is the best way to help children learn? This has been a concern in education and has been a topic of various studies (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck & Taylor, 2003). Berthelsen and Brownlee (2015) find that children learn by observing their social settings; they are active in their learning; they collaborate with adults and peers and they initiate their own learning experiences. The body of literature examining how children learn is growing rapidly. Numerous studies have been conducted and results suggest the importance of children interacting and learning in creative, investigative and problem-solving ways, where they can take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning and where their emotional and imaginative needs are met (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2003; Schweinhart & Weikart, 2016; Saracho, 2017). Play is acknowledged as supporting intellectual development alongside social,

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emotional and physical development (Wood, 2007; Honig, 2006; Frost Wortham & Reifel, 2015; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2015; Degotardi, 2015; Brewer, 2004).

Various traditional as well as contemporary theories are entrenched in early childhood literate to explain how we can present children with the right stimuli on which to focus their attention and mental effort so that they will acquire knowledge and skills (Slavin, 2013). Early Childhood theorists like Froebel regards kindergarten as a "Child's Garden" where children grow naturally through creative play, exploration and self-expression (Essa, 2007). Froebel's approach to early childhood teaching emphasizes the inherent nature of children's learning that unfolds through their play activities. He sees play activities as a pure and natural mode of learning through which children achieve harmony (Essa, 2007).

On the other hand, psychoanalytical theorists, such as Freud, believe that children's play is primarily emotional (Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007). Through enacting real scenarios in their play, children work out their emotional conflicts in play such as a visit to a dentist (Hughes, 2016; Ndegwa, 2015; Santer et al., 2007). Through play, children's express emotions that relate to situations that they have no control over and this helps to develop mastery over stressful situations (Santer et al., 2007)

Erikson theorise the psychosocial stages of child development (Mooney, 2000). According to Erikson, children learn to master their emotional conflicts and resolve the anomaly in each of the stages. For example, the first stage of trust versus mistrust, to a child, means achieving a sense of trust and secured attachment that outweighs mistrust and this same feeling will provide the child with confidence to explore, play and interact with others in the future (Mooney, 2000).

Emphasizing the affective aspects of play, both Freud and Erikson position play as a tool for emotional development and a medium for children to cope with difficult experiences and to work out their problem (Hughes, 2016; Santer et al, 2007) and learning is an individual

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endeavor (Frost et al., 2015). Teachers who are influenced by psychoanalysis theorists will provide children with materials, time and space to play independently for them to work out their emotional conflicts (Trawick-Smith, 2008).

Several other theorists hold a constructivist view in children's learning (Bruner, 2016; Montessori, 1965; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 11978). For example. Dewey advocates that children are active learners who learn directly from exploration and discovery (Mooney, 2000). He believes in progressive education where the focus of learning is based on the child's interest rather than on subject matter (Mooney, 2000). Montessori (1965) regards the child as constructing and transforming the environment through his or her own activity. According to Montessori (1965), when children engage in play, they learn about the world and reality of how things work. Bruner's constructivist theory (1966) views learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The child selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses and makes decisions, relying on cognitive structure (that is, schemes, mental models) which provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the child to go beyond the information given (Bruner, 2016).

According to Frost et al., (2015), theoretical frameworks provide different lenses for understanding play because each theory allows us to see different aspects of play. Each of these theoretical perspectives' points to the importance of play, but the underlying assumptions differ (Frost et al., 2015). Perhaps the two most prominent theoretical orientations, which have shaped the current conceptions of children's learning and development, are those of Piaget and Vygotsky (Berk, 2006; Crain, 2000). The reason for their prominence lies in the fact that Piaget's theory on cognitive development is often regarded as the single most comprehensive and compelling theory on the study of children's intellectual development with "more than thirty books and several hundred articles" written by Piaget (Essa, 2007; Crain, 2000). Vygotsky, through agreeing on the importance of such intrinsic development, stresses that

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children's ability to learn constructively is also dependent on the social-cultural and historical settings where family history and economic circumstances do influence a child's development (Hughes, 2016).

Piaget (1962) believes that children can construct knowledge about the real world through play. This view suggests that the whole child integrates both cognitive and emotional information in meaningful ways with the help of a rich environment and supportive adult (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Central to this view is the idea that knowledge is acquired through a constructive process of the learner and that through meaningful activities, children not only practice and hone their social skills but also engage in cognitive acts that expand their repertoires of learning (Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009).

From a practical viewpoint, teachers who believe in the constructivist cognitive approach will provide a classroom environment that allows for exploration and experimentation and is seen as "operating with" a child where the teacher follows a "wait-challenge-wait" procedure and ensuring that the child has ample opportunity to assimilate and accommodate through the provision of novelty in the environment (Bodrova & Leong, 2014).

The theoretical framework of this study examined the early childhood education theories like the Vygotskian theory, Piaget's theory, Navist theory and Frobel's theory. The body of literature examining how children learn is growing rapidly. Numerous studies have been conducted and results suggests the importance of children interacting and learning in creative, investigative and problem-solving ways, where they can take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning and where their emotional and imaginative needs are met (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Play is acknowledge as supporting intellectual development alongside social, emotional and physical development (Wood, 2013).

Various traditional as well as contemporary theories are entrenched in early childhood literature to explain how we can present children with the right stimuli on which to focus their attention and mental effort so that they will acquire knowledge and skills (Slavin, 2013). On the other hand, psychoanalytical theorists, such as Freud, believe that children's play is primarily emotional (Santer et al., 2007). Through enacting real scenarios in their play, children work out their emotional conflicts in play such as a visit to a dentist (Sandseter, 2007).

Emphasizing the affective aspects of play, both Freud and Erikson position play as a tool for emotional development and a medium for children to cope with difficult experiences and to work out their problem (Santer et al., 2007) and learning is an individual endeavor (Frost et al., 2015). Teachers who are influenced by psychoanalyses theorists will provide children with materials, time and space to play independently for them to work out their emotional conflicts (Trawick-Smith, 2008).

Several other theorists hold a constructivist view in children's learning (Bruner, 1960; Montessori, 1965). For example, Dewey advocates that children are active learners who learn directly from exploration and discovery (Mooney, 2000. He believes in progressive education where the focus of learning is based on the child's interest rather than on subject matter (Mooney, 2000). Montessori (1965) regards the child as constructing and transforming the environment through his or her own activity. According to Montessori (1965), when children engage in play, they learn about the world and reality of how things work. Bruner's constructivist theory (2016) views learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current and past knowledge.

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Perhaps the four most prominent theoretical orientations, which have shaped the current conceptions of children's learning and development, are those of Piaget, Vygotsky, Navist theory and Frobel's theory (Berk, 2006).

From a practical viewpoint, teachers who believe in the constructivist cognitive approach will provide a classroom environment that allows for exploration and experimentation, and is seen as "operating with" a child where the teacher follows a "wait-challenge-wait" procedure and ensuring that the child has ample opportunity to assimilate and accommodate through the provision of novelty in the environment. Whilst each theoretical perspective points to the importance of play, what differs is the relative emphasis on certain aspects of play that advocates place on their approach. Also, some of the approach of the theories often teacher centred been referred to as developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP) as the practices do not relate to children's daily experiences; the materials are not meaningful to children; and there is little opportunity for hands-on activities.

Till now, there is still an ongoing controversy concerning "appropriate pedagogical practices" that exists for many early childhood educators in Ghana. Many educators are still engaging in the longstanding debate about whether teacher-directed or child-initiated practices should be used with young children. Implementation of developmentally appropriate practices appears to be difficult for many early childhood teachers. Play involves different kinds of teacher interactions with sixty-four (64) children and teachers have to decide on the degree of involvement in children's activities.

Teachers have to observe what children are doing, support their efforts, and get involved thoughtfully to support additional learning. The development of emotional and social expression is a vital part of childhood and gaining peer acceptance. Through social play, children form and maintain relationships with peers. Children who do not form relationships with peers are at great risk for not learning skills that are vital in communicating with others

(Ashiabi, 2007). Children who are able to interact with peers are able to learn and practice new skills, refine old ones, and gain proficiency in social expression.

2.1.1 Navist Theory

Navist theory on language acquisition holds that people are born with a predisposition to learn language. The theory holds that children are born with a hard-wired language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains and that the brains contain the major principles of language, which is ready made to quickly, acquire language at specific stages in the development process.

According to Chomsky's theory when young children are exposed to a language, their LAD makes it possible for them to set the parameters and deduce the grammatical principles because the principles are innate. He states that language structures are heavily influenced by the environment hence the theory holds that language skills were developed through watching and learning our parents and other people in the environment. He states that the environment heavily influences language structures. The theory is relevant to the study because it posits that children acquire language in a social interactive environment with the help of adults who are parents, peers and teachers during play. It is important to state that the Vygotskian theory, Piaget's theory, Navist theory are supported by Frobel's theory (1952), which emphasizes on the need for the child to engage in play with objects. Frobel states that with objects the child will learn the underlying concepts represented by the objects. He not only emphasizes on children playing with objects but also playing outdoors with object.

2.1.2 Sociocultural Theory

From a social constructivist perspective, children build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with the outside world (Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky emphasizes the social influence - the roles that adults and peers play in what and how the child learns (Mooney, 2000; Crain, 2000; Berk, 2006). He argues that the child needs social tools (such as speech writing skills, mathematical and scientific concepts) to advance his/her cognitive and intellectual abilities (Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006; Crain, 2000: Hughes. 2016). Peers and teachers who are able

to systematically provide scaffolds to advance the child's cognitive and intellectual front best serve Vygotsky's notions of guided participation (Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006: Crain, 2000). The child should be positioned in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to advance from the existing position to the next level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). As Vygotsky puts it "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p.87).

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

Vygotsky (2016) addresses the significance of play in the development of symbolic thinking as a cornerstone of cognition. He argues that play contains all the developmental tendencies (cognitive, physical, social and emotional) and thus creates a zone of proximal development that pulls the child forward. For this reason, play activities are essential in the pre-school years because it leads to development, giving rise to abstract thinking, self-awareness and self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1966). From the socio-cultural perspective, adult interaction serves an important role in children's learning and development (Bodrova & Leong. 2014). Teachers who believe in this perspective are encouraged to participate broadly in children's play activities (Trawick-Smith, 2008), take on multiple teaching roles and used a variety of play activities in the classroom to scaffold children's learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2014). The literature reviewed within section 23 provides insights on how children learn via various theoretical perspectives. Whilst each theoretical perspective points to the importance of play,

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what differs is the relative emphasis on certain aspects of play that advocates place on their approach. Next, this chapter will explore literature on the third crucial element that is, the teachers' classroom practices in early childhood education.

2.1.3 Vygotskian Theory

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

Play, therefore. according to his theory, creates a zone of proximal development as a child's behaviour in play is said to be "above his average age, it is as though he were a head taller than himself (Vygotsky, 1978). In short, imaginary realization of unrealizable desires contains rules of behaviour that a player subordinates to and this subordination teaches him to separate meaning from object. As Vygotsky (1978) states that the child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Thus, a condition is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees. Separation of meaning from object or action (development of abstract thought) is a necessary component for the development of literacy, a requirement for understanding that, for example, the shape "a' or 'A' represents the letter a.

2.1.4 Cognitive Constructivism

The primary conceptual framework of Piaget's theory is cognitive constructivism (Crain, 2000; Berk, 2006; Hendrick & Weissman, 2007; Essa, 2007). Piaget emphasizes the importance of young children constructing knowledge (understanding concepts) through their own activities,

as opposed to being fold correct answers by others (Berk, 2006: Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). Piaget sees the child as the source of action, actively constructing knowledge through a process of meaning-making through connection with prior knowledge and the real world (Berk, 2006: Hendrick & Weissman, 2007). When mismatch occurs, the child experiences disequilibrium, thereby activating his/her mental processes to resolve such disequilibrium, and in doing so, created a new scheme (Essa, 2007; Hughes, 2016; Berk, 2006). Piaget views cognitive development as a stage process (Berk, 2006; Essa, 2007). A child develops from the sensorimotor stage, pre-operational stage to concrete operational and finally formal operational stage (Berk, 2006: Essa, 2007). Each of these stages is characterized by qualitative changes in a child's thinking (Piaget, 1962). In the sensorimotor stage, (from birth to two years), the infant knows about the world through their actions and perceptions. In the preoperational stage (from two to six years), children begin to use symbols, images, words or actions to represent their thoughts. Their thinking is characterized by egocentrism, irreversibility and centration (Berk, 2006). In the concrete operational stage (from six to twelve years), children understand concepts of conservation and continue to expand their thinking and can perform logical mental operations, such as addition and subtraction. In the formal operational stage (twelve years onwards). children are able to reason deductively, to formulate and test hypotheses (Piaget, 1962; Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006).

Piaget (1962) asserts that children acquire physical, logico-mathematical and social knowledge when they explore their environment. Physical knowledge is acquired from activities that allow children to observe and draw conclusions about the physical properties of the objects. In the logico-mathematical realm, children's thoughts become more differentiated and are able to act on the objects and create abstract reasoning and relationships, for example, a child playing with blocks will soon discover that the longer piece can serve as a sturdier base than the shorter. Social knowledge is assimilated through social conventions that have been taught by third

parties through imparting cultural norms and societal customs and acceptable behaviors. Through social interchanges, children begin to be more aware of the ideas and opinions of peers and they learn that others can have views different from their own.

According to Piaget's theory, knowledge is acquired through adaptation, modification of one's own means of interacting with the environment to fit personal needs (Bodrova & Leong. 2014). As noted by Bodrova and Leong (2014), Piaget's work provides a basis for constructionist theories with the belief that "knowledge is constructed and learning occurs through independent discovery and the child's own construction of the world through interaction with physical objects (Bodrova & Leong, 2014).

With regard to play, Piaget's (1962) emphasis was on two stages of play. The first is practice play, which he related to sensory motor activity and the second which evolves to symbolic play due to involvement of representational thought. To him (symbolic) play is an area of activity whose motivation is not adaptation to reality but, on the contrary, assimilation of reality to the self, without coercions or sanctions. Piaget further argued that imitation in play nevertheless facilitates adaptation through accommodation to new experiences leading to new behaviors (Bodrova & Leong, 2014). For Piaget therefore, developmental functions of play are immediate.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 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 child's life, early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age (Miles & Browne, 2004). Provost and LaFreniere (2014).) also shared this definition as they elaborated it accordingly as the time between 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 (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). As definitions of these authorities imply, we believe that early childhood education brings or exposes children (birth to eight) into the world. Significance of the early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years. This situation is complementary with research results based on long term effects of early education on later life (Groark, 2012).

2.2.2 The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education, within the last few decades considered different Gelds (Groark, 2012) such as developmental psychology, cultural psychology, childhood studies, cultural anthropology, history and philosophy.

'This is because recent studies showed that babies and young children are born with the capacity to understand the world around them (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). More so, children's brains are ready to learn when they core to the world. During this process: both the environment and pones take an important role which in turn, builds the bran (Levitt, 2008). Considering what have been said so far by authorities in respect to childhood education, it can be asserted that children are beings perceived as competent learners rather than empty slates. This has therefore brought changes in the way of perceiving children or early childhood education. The readiness of children to learn even when they are just born wagered the ideas of necessity of early childhood education both for the individual child and for the society as a whole child coming from low-income families as cognitive growth and school readiness. Besides children from low socio-economic background, good quality of early childhood education provides early reading and math skills to children from high and middle socio-economic status.

Early education cultivates children in terms of socialization rather than purely academic enhancement such as math and reading. Webb (2003) elaborated that children learn cooperation through education in child care centres and such skills help them to obey rules and stay safe in

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the society. Regarding socialization, parents also share the same perspective. In the study of Seng (2015), it was revealed that one of the biggest reasons for parents sending children to early childhood education centres is to get them socialized. In fact, in a longitudinal study, Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) explained that children who received early childhood education became emotionally and socially more competent adults compared to the ones whom 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, Oppenheim and Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) 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 into a college education. In other studies, such as Chicago Longitudinal study and the Cost, Quality and Child outcome study indicated that getting high quality early childhood education make children become successful students and citizens in their later lives (Reynolds & Ou, 2004). On the other hand, according to the World Bank Report (2015), between 0-6 years of age, each one (1) dollar invested on children was returned in a fold of 7.6 dollars in the future as a result of the productivity gained through early childhood education. Parallel to this study, Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) indicated that 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, 2015) 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, socio-cultural 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.

2.2.3 Globalization and Early Childhood Education

Globalization has reshaped many issues such as international relations, population growth, development, human rights, the environment, labour, health care and poverty. It also affected and reshaped education as well (Grant & Grant 2007; Koggel, 2003). Beginning from early childhood education to college education, we may see the influences of globalization. Effect of globalization cut across all countries. After the 1985, we have seen more of globalization as we have entered into an information age by the mass spread of computers and internet all around the world. This necessitated the training of people who have skills at several foreign languages, and able to produce and make use of technology. In the light of this, countries started to reshape their curriculums in all levels of education (from early childhood to college) towards cultivating those types of people (File, 2014). As this cultivation process starts from the first level which

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is early education, the countries are looking for the best curriculum model in early childhood education.

In addition to the need for fully competent individuals having the skills and knowledge of dealing with the new world's demands, changes in the family units (Morrison 2007) such as more mothers entering into the work force or rich parents who look for the best educational places for their children as early as possible, projected the early childhood education as growing concern. It is based on this knowledge that the Ministry of Education (MOE) put much effort and started to make investigations on enhancing the quality for early childhood to strengthen our early childhood centres to improve upon the quality of education needed to meet the standard of the country.

2.2.4 Early Childhood Teachers' Beliefs and Self-Perceptions.

More recent research has pointed to the fact that a teacher's belief system will determine the quality of education in the classroom (Garvis, 2011; Garvis, Twigg and Pendergast, 2011). According to Fang (2014) 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, 2017; 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 Denzin and Lincoln (2018) who posited that a teacher's action is reflective of what they know and believe and this knowledge and belief becomes the philosophical framework which guides their teaching methodology. Beliefs also emerge from one's past and present experiences and socialization or cultural models that were presented (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018). The development of these beliefs are based on previous experiences in the teachers' life

and has a bearing on how they relate to the children in their classroom (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018; Borg, 2001). This point is especially critical in light of the cultural-historical legacy of early childhood education in Jamaica and the teacher pedagogy that are 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's (1972) Self-Perception 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, original italics).

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 as 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 the 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 (Shanmugarathnam, 2003; 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

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their work as allowing for an intensive relationship with children, contributing to their moral, social and cognitive development..." (pp. 213-214).

However, Lim and Torr (2007) 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, Lim and Torr (2007) 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 "40 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, 2008). 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, 2014). 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, 2015).

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. Good and Brophy (2017) described teachers as socializing agents who have a significant influence on students' behaviour as they transmit powerful interpretations of values and expectations. However, as Shanmugarathnam (2003) found in their study, early childhood teachers' self-perception 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.

2.2.5 The Need for Quality Pre-school Education

Before the turn of the millennium, the aims of early childhood education in Africa tend to focus on bilingualism and preparation for formal primary education (Sharpe, 2000). The focus was on academic skills with an emphasis on subject content, through a didactic teaching approach that was teacher-directed and achievement-oriented (Sharpe, 2000; Tan, 2007). As Africa moves towards a knowledge-based economy, a creative and innovative workforce is imperative for the country to succeed (Tan, 2007). It is not surprising that policymakers and educators are being swept along in the educational policy directives (Tan & Gopinathan, 2000). There is a need to re-examine old ways of thinking and doing things and the concomitant need for flexibility, creativity and innovation (Tan & Gopinathan, 2000). Also, educators need to align educational curricula to the rapidly changing economic and information technology landscape (Tan-Niam, 2000; Sharpe, 2002; Mangione, & Maniates, 2015). A paradigm shift seems

necessary to bring about a well-educated population, equipped with knowledge and skills, dispositions and inclinations to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century (Shanmugarathnam, 2003: Lee, 2008). This has reactivated a long-standing concern about how to educate our young children so that they will achieve and attain intellectual growth that remains relevant throughout their lives (Tan, 2007; Lim & Torr, 2008). What are the best models of curriculum delivery? What are the desired outcomes of pre-school education? How can the quality of preschool education benefit a child's development in the Ghanaian context? The choice of curriculum has often been debated among academics and practitioners in early childhood education. The educational pendulum has swung from the traditional academic model of education that is teacher-directed with formal instruction to a child-directed curriculum, where children learn through play, discovery and exploration (Wishon, Crabtree & Jones, 2018; Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Research on teaching approaches and pedagogies has pointed to play as a crucial element to children's learning and development (NAESP, 1990; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2000). There is a well-established body of research reaffirming the value of play-oriented experiences in all aspects of children's learning, particularly in the affective and cognitive domains (Wood & Attfield, 2015; Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2018). In 2003, in line with the "Thinking School, Learning Nation" (TSLN) concept (Shanmugarathnam, 2003), early childhood education in Singapore took on a new emphasis to learning. A new curriculum framework, "A Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore (the Framework)" was introduced by the Ministry of Education (Pre-School Unit, 2008) and this Framework addresses pre-school education for children aged four-year olds (Nursery or N1), five-year olds (Kindergarten One or K1) and six-year-olds (Kindergarten Two or K2) (Mangione, & Maniates, 2015; Lim & Torr, 2008).

2.2.6 Features of the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework

The establishment of the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework serves to formalize the Government's recognition of the importance of early childhood education in Africa (Ang, 2006; Lim & Tort, 2008). The Framework reflects an attempt to focus on the context and process of learning where the emphasis is to give educational providers a clear direction for developing an educational programme that meets the needs of the children physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively (Shanmugarathnam, 2003). This Framework is an indication on the part of the government to shift the paradigm of early childhood education towards a less academic and more child-centered curriculum (Mangione, & Maniates, 2015; Lim & Torr, 2008), and at the same time to align with international movements in the early childhood sector to raise the standards of pre-school curriculum and provision in the settings (Mangione, & Maniates, 2015). The Kindergarten Curriculum Framework is underpinned by six areas of learning: aesthetics and creative expression, numeracy, language and Literacy, motor skills development, environmental awareness, and self and social awareness (Mangione, & Maniates, 2015). These six areas of learning highlight the main areas of interest of preschool children such as exploring and interacting with the environment; skills and knowledge in numeracy and language and literacy, active participation and contributing to self and social awareness (Mangione, & Maniates, 2015). Children are viewed as active learners, where learning is best supported through opportunities for play and interaction (Ministry of Education. 2003). The Framework provides a guide to developing an educational programme that is geared towards a more child-centred pedagogy with an emphasis on play (Ministry of Education, 2003). While the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework advocates a child centred pedagogy, where learning is best supported through opportunities for play and interaction (Ministry of Education, 2003), it does not purport to be prescriptive (Lim & Torr, 2008). There is now certain disquiet about the early childhood education in Ghana for not being able to respond fast enough to this paradigm shift. Literature in the Ghana context has suggested that the play-based and child-centred

approaches recommended in the Framework run counter to the merit-based and examination-oriented culture in Ghana (Cheah, 2018; Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2014). Play-based approaches do not seem to be well received by parents who are driven by the pragmatics of preparation for formal schooling (Sharpe, 2002).

2.2.7 Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in Early Childhood Education

In this section the researcher discusses 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, the researcher also discussed 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, 2017). 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 programme with other socio-emotional and physical development aspects (Bredekamp & Copple, 2017). 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. 2009). 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 language and develop social. physical and problem-solving skills. Ebbeck & Gokhale (2014) 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 tote-learning without hands-on experiences, would be considered developmentally appropriate practices and not to be encouraged in the classroom. DAP soon therefore became the 'best practices' model and guiding principle for early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp. 2009: NAEYC, 2009).

In 2009 NAEYC revised its policy statement based on new research and concerns from experienced practitioners regarding the changing contexts in which early childhood educations occurs (Bredekamp, 2011; NAEYC, 2009). 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, preschoolers, kindergarten and early primary grades (Bredekamp, 2011; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009).

File (2012) still challenged some of these notions of the recent revised edition of DAP. She argued that the philosophical underpinnings of DAP still had strong ties to traditional child

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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. Genishi, 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 socio-cultural relationship with the people it serves.

2.2.8 Play Defined

Play is range of intrinsically motivated activities done for recreational pleasure and enjoyment. (Early Childhood Educational Journal 2007:35(2):199-207. Holt NL) There was a time when "play was king and early childhood was its domain" (Paley, 2004. p. 4). In 1816. Fred| Froebel (UNICEF, 2013) created the concept of kindergarten, which means "child's garden." The kindergarten and preschool teachers of today struggle with implementing play in their classrooms. Often teachers use playtime as a reward for good behavior. Due to the belief that it would help children learn more, early childhood education began moving away from play in the 1930s and moving toward teacher-directed activities. In the 1980s and 1990s, academics were added to early childhood classrooms and, as a direct result, playtime was limited (UNICEF, 2003). The American Academy of Paediatrics, along with Kenneth Ginsburg (2007), published a document in which play was defined. The document stressed the importance of play in relation to children and their families.

Ginsburg asserted that play is imperative to a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR, 2016) acknowledged that play is a right for every child (Ginsburg). Play has been

a concern for the last several decades. The International Play Association was formed in 1061 to ensure a child's right to play (Wenner, 2009). According to Ginsburg (2007). the

interactions and engagement that a child experiences during daily activities are play. It encourages bonding first with family members, then with friends. When a child experiences play with an adult taking the lead, the child expands his/her play skills. Child-directed play enhances the ability to develop a sense of self, explore personal interests, and develop leadership skills. Play also contributes to healthy brain development, and gives a child the opportunity for creativity and the ability to use their imaginations, and to assume social roles. all of which prepare children for their futures (Ginsburg. 2007). The literature has extensively documented that children learn and develop through play (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2018; Howard, 2010a, 20106; Johnson & Dinger, 2012; Lillemyr, 2009; Moyles, 2015; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Oliver. & Klupman, 2002; Piaget, 1962; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006).

Play helps children begin to understand their culture, self-regulation, and their place in society by giving them the opportunity to practice (Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2014). Play gives a child the opportunity to see the world through friends' eyes. They begin to understand others* perspectives and differences. Through modelling and interaction, children realize their role in society. Ultimately, play helps them become contributing members of society and part of the societal structure (Duncan & Luck, 2008).

2.2.9 Concept of Play

The perspective of children's play was initially considered in education as a yardstick for development of pedagogy (Ebbeck: & Gokhale, 2014). There have been lots of research and findings produced over the years relating to the definition of play. Several researchers and theorists define play differently. However, it is clear that many different perspective views on

what play is overlapped with other people's views. Play can he viewed. conceptualized and defined from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives.

Play is defined as an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed and episodic (Fromberg as cited in Elkind, 2016). Play as pleasurable and an activity is seen as a situation by which children learn and interact with the environment and the world around them. In this regard since there is no clear and agreed definition, Gordon (2009) argues that play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players the unexpected making transformation possible. Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences. The voluntary movement of children which includes exploration, playing and learning according to their interests, offer them the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and level of maturation. Additionally, Wood (2009) argues defining characteristics of play include intrinsic motivation, engagement, dependence on internal rather than external rules, control and autonomy, and attention to means rather than ends. Children formulate their own rules to suit and match with the play situation. Therefore, children experience the joy and skills development through self- motivation. According to Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008), play is considered as a learning situation or an activity initiated by children, on the other hand, learning is regarded as a result of a practice or activity initiated by any adult to help children to learn. Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson further stated that playful activities as well as learning situations are as jovial smee both play and learning are seen as an activity that is transgression. Play and Learning are interrelated: the two words touched on each other in a pre-school getting and further serves as an important process for promoting children's learning and development (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). Although educators generally agree that play is valuable in the early childhood curriculum (Wood, 2013), the definition of play varies as different characteristics are attributed to it. Attempts to

categorize play have resulted in confusion rather than clarity, and the lens through which one views play has Throughout the 20th century, many studies have been conducted that delve into different aspects of play in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

The studies have confirmed that play is an integral part of encouraging contributed to the conundrum. The adult-centric lens sometimes provides a different view of play compared with the children's interpretation. However, if we acknowledge that children are capable of providing important and reliable perspectives on their experiences (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016), their definition of play should also be taken into account when play is incorporated into classroom activities.

Furthermore, psychological definitions have focused on a search for regularities (Kieff & Casbergue, 2016). In contrast, contemporary ways of understanding focus on cultural variations of play and players, and the ways in which play changes over time, context, ages and cultural contexts (Brooker, 2003). While acknowledging the varied definitions and interpretations of play, this study examines play frow socio-cultural perspectives in order to capture these variations. Furthermore, just as play is an inclusive concept to define, its relationship to learning is also complex Play in the Preschool Classroom The central assertion waved throughout this study is the importance of play within the scope of childhood. Vygotsky, Piaget, Montessori, Dewey, and Froebel are several of the prominent pioneers who have laid the cornerstone for early childhood education. Individuals are influenced today by the investigations that these prominent researchers completed. Although their approaches vary, they share the belief that children learn through active participation and that meaningful learning occurs mainly during play (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers. 2012. Elkind, 2015: Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Wood & Attfield. 2015).

Throughout the 20th century, many studies have been conducted that delve into different aspects of play in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The studies have confirmed that play

is an integral part of encouraging children to become lifelong learners (Parten, 2012; Smilansky & Shefatya, 2015). The researcher is curious and hopeful to find studies that have focused on play specifically in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Overview on Play in Early Childhood Development It is widely acknowledged that experience in early childhood strongly affect human development. Research evidence from longitudinal and neuroscience studies has shown that children's earliest learning experiences are most significant in determining their future progress in education and subsequent success in life (Kwan. 2018). The quality of ECE has a significant and long-term influence on the educational performance and life chances (Sylva, 2004). for young children's optimal development. there is need for consistent and responsive caregivers within stimulating environments where play materials and other opportunities for interaction are abundant. Froebel (1987) argues that play is children's natural occupation before cultural restraints and formal schooling takes over. Play is the first means of development of the human mind. It is the first effort to make acquaintance with the outward world, to correct original experiences, to reinforce facts and to exercise the powers of body and mind (Froebel, 1987). Bruner (2006) argues that play serves as a vehicle for social, emotional and cognitive development. This implies that the negative emotional and serious consequences of errors and setbacks are reduced in play. In play, children talk freely, explore freely and when one is mistaken, he/she is freely corrected causing no ill feelings on both mistaken and corrector part. By discussing and questioning in such a friendly atmosphere, they develop a critical outlook on issues, which is in itself, prerequisite for academic autonomy. Erikson (1963) agrees with the idea that children use play to make up from defeat, suffering and frustration. Play has a therapeutic value, in that, it takes away the attention from the objective worries about self and focuses on an interesting objective pursuit (Bruner, 2015). In addition, Bruner contends that when children play in a rich environment, they can exercise judgment, mastery and competence, and if they are unable to experience power and satisfaction that comes through

play, their holistic development us likely to be jeopardized. Thus, ECE programme is supposed to translate the theories and principles related to early childhood development in to practice. This involves concentrating on the use of child-centered teaching and learning methods specifically emphasizing on the use of play as a teaching strategy.

2.2.10 Benefits of Play

The developmental literature has identified play as stimulating all aspects of children's developmental domains (Frost et al., 2015: Johnson et al. 2015: Degotardi, 2015: Hong. 2006: Wood 2007: Brewer, 2004: Fino, 2003).

Also, play activities are socially and symbolically complex and involve social reciprocity which is important for affective and personality development (Brewer, 2004; Degotardi, 2015). Advocates of play frequently claim that play contributes to the development of problem-solving capabilities and creative thinking in children (Pellegrini. 2016. Smilansky & Shefatya. 2015; Brewer, 2004). Children need to organize tasies, assign characters to assume the play roles, engage in problem-solving behaviors such as looking for props and materials to meet the play intent. A play-based curriculum is said to offer children opportunities to acquire these positive attributes and dispositions that are considered essential to learning, such as planning and organization, concentration, engagement, reflection, involvement and participation (Katz, 2015. Brewer, 2004; Broadhead, 2004; Wood, 2007). The value of play as a facilitator of cognitive growth has been addressed by many eply childhood educators and researchers (Smilansky, 2016; Vygotsky, 1966). More specifically in the area of literacy, studies by Bergen and Mauer (2000), found that four-year olds play (in the form of rhyming games, making shopping lists and "reading" story books to stuffed toys) enhanced both language and reading readiness (including phonological awareness) after the children had entered kindergarten. Kindergarteners with increased phonological awareness relative to their peers, in turn. had more diverse vocabularies. used more complex sentences and showed the extent of Their

competencies most often in playful environments (Bergen & Mauer, 2000). Similar studies carried out by various researchers found common ground 13 their conclusions where children demonstrate their advance language skills in playful environments and these language skills are strongly related to literacy developments (Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Christie & Enz, 1992: Einarsdottir. 2000; Stone & Christie, 2014: Christie & Roskos. 2006). Findings from a more recent longitudinal study in the United States have shown that the rich language used in play has an impact on children's literacy development. In the Home School Study of Language and Literacy Development, Dickenson and Tabors (2001) examined the home and school Literacy environments of low-income children from aged three through middle school. The study reported consistent relationships between the language that children used during play and their performance on literacy and language measures. At aged three, children who engaged in more pretend talk during play were more likely to perform well on assessments of receptive vocabulary and narrative production. Dickinson and Tabors (2001), also reported consistent links between play and long-term language growth. For example, the total number of words and the variety of words that children used during free play in preschool were positively related to the performance on language measures administered in kindergarten. Play lays the foundation for logical mathematical thinking and stimulates "early math" in children's everyday experiences (Ginsburg et al. 2008). Children come to know of informal ideas of more and less, taking away, shape, size, location, pattern and measurement (Ginsburg et al., 2008). The mathematical knowledge gained through everyday play activities seems to occur as a natural component of cognitive development, often without any adult instruction (Ginsburg et al., 2008). For example, children often count during play periods without any prompting (Ginsburg et al., 2008). In another study, Seo and Ginsburg (2004) observed four- and five-year olds to see how often they engaged in spontaneous mathematics activities, During the fifteen-minute observation period. seventy-nine out of ninety children (88%) participated in at least one

mathematical activity. Of these children, seven out of fifteen minutes on average were spent on mathematical activity. suggesting that children spent a considerable amount of their fee playtime engaged in mathematical concept activities (Seo & Ginsburg, 2004).

Another avenue where children generally acquire the skills of comparing, counting, classifying, ordering and using fractions is through block play, using different types of blocks (Wolfgang, Stannard, & Jones, 2001; Varol & Farran, 2006). Construction play with blocks offers children opportunities to classify, measure, order, count, use fractions, and become aware of depth, width, length, symmetry, shape and space (Hirsch, 2014). Thus, in contemporary play literature, play is often regarded as essential in contributing to lifelong learning, inspiring creativity and overall well-being of children (Bergen. 2016: Brewer, 2004; Broadhead, 2004: Frost et al. 2015. Johnson et al., 2015: Degotardi, 2015; Wood 2007: Hirsh-Pasek et al. 2009). When children play, their development moves along paths of increasing cognitive, social, emotional and physical complexity through the use of signs and symbols: creating rules: changing roles and play scenarios: and through controlling their behaviour and actions (Sutton-Smith. 2017: Broadhead. 2004: Johnson et al., 2015: Wood, 2007). As children become skilled players. their play episodes are characterized by high cognitive challenge and become more sustained and complex as they are engaged in co-constructing of meanings and understandings with peers and adults (Broadhead, 2004). In order to use Play as a means to promote children's learning teachers will need to first recognize the different forms of play children often engage in. Researchers generally study several common categories of play, though in practice, occurring episodes of play often bave a mix of different forms of play taking place simultaneously and over the course of early childhood (Smilansky, 2016; Stone, 2015; Brewer, 2004; Wood & Atfield, 2015; Firsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Piaget (1962) and Piaget and Inhelder (1969) have described different types of play with objects, and these include functional play, symbolic play and games with rules and constructions. According to Piaget (1962), functional

play or practice play involves the repetition of an act for pleasure or skill practice. It refers to play activities in which children explore the possibilities of materials through physical manipulation (Brewer, 2004; Santer et al., 2007). For example, a child who is exploring blocks may start by examining the physical attributes of the blocks learn their properties and gain an understanding of what he/she can or cannot do with blocks (Brewer, 2004). Children tend to use their senses to explore and learn about the materials, see how they fit with other objects before using these objects as props for pretend play or something else altogether (Brewer, 2004). Such exploration requires deep concentration during which the child learns all there is to know about the object and once the knowledge has been acquired, it is then incorporated into play acuity (Santer et al., 2007). Research on object play has also been extensively studied. McLoyd (2016) studied thirty-six children from ages three to five years when they played in groups of three with high-structured toys (for example, a tea set) or low-structured toys (for example, blocks). The three-year olds demonstrated more non-interactive pretend play with high-structured toys than the low- structured toys. The five-year olds, however, were indifferent. In this study, dependence on objects in pretend play declined substantially with the four-year olds. In this case, pretend initiations occurred without the presence of a physical object but merely on the plane of ideas that children have in mind (McLoyd, 2014). Power, Chapieski, and McGrath (2015) noted that by observing children while engaged in object manipulation and pretend play provides vital information about children's social, problem-solving and creative skills.

Piaget (1962) articulated that symbolic play is a form of make-believe play, which involves the representation of absent objects. Symbolic play is also referred to as "make-believe** or "imaginative" play (Singer, 2018); "socio-dramatic" play (Smilansky, 2016) and "thematic" play (Feitelson & Ross, 2018). Dramatic and socio-dramatic play involves complex cognitive, social and emotional processes such as taking on the characteristics or behaviors of another

person and creating make-believe transformations (Santer et al. 2007). Studies have found that children who engage in more symbolic/pretend play have greater conversational – success emotional understanding and increased performance on problem-solving and divergent thinking (Vygotsky. 1978. Spodek & Saracho. 2006: Dickinson & Tabors, 2001: Tsao, 2002). A number of researchers have investigated the relationship between symbolic play and oral language development and findings suggest that cognition and oral language tend to occur together and correlate highly between the ages of one and five years (Wolfgang & Sanders. 1981: Pellegrini, 2016).

'Teachers' Roles in Children's Play At this juncture, it should be noted that the above literature review on the benefits of play are inherently linked to caregivers and early childhood teachers as they take on the intermediary roles to nurture children's play. setting the stage and providing the environments to harvest these benefits. Researchers have stressed the importance of teachers' roles in providing children with a quality educational setting (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). A number of studies have focused on the role of the teacher in facilitating children's learning through play and that teacher participation in classroom playful activities encourages children's involvement in such activities (Jobnson, Christie & Yawkey, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford, 2015: Pugh & Duff 2006; Anning & Edwards, 2006). According to Bondioli (2001), adult-child interaction during play activities may assist children to foster and exercise their play skills that they have yet to master or developed. Through play interactions, teachers can provide children with developmentally appropriate materials. ideas. Practical achievements and support them in the development of their own thoughts and interests (Frost et al., 2015: Vygotsky. 1978). Other research studies have indicated that through play. teachers can serve as links between children and their surrounding world. Through play interactions, teachers can validate and challenge children's senses and their thoughts. which will enable children to focus on awareness. interactions and Intentions (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006).

In sum. play involves different kinds of teacher interactions with children and teachers have to decide on the degree of involvement in children's activities. Teachers have to observe what children are doing. support their efforts. and get involved thoughtfully to support additional learning. Ancient Romans called the teacher who was responsible for inducing elements of knowledge to young children "a magister ludi or game master (Lima, 2013). Nani and Kimani (2010) describe roles and various kinds of teachers" interventions in play as follows;

I. Teachers as observers: Teachers must be good observers of children's play and help them to interpret issues which emanate in play processes.

II. Teachers as collaborators: Teachers can extend children's play by adding a new toy prop or by asking a question that elaborates the theme.

III. Teachers as planners: Teachers must also plan for children's play. They should plan for a conducive environment, time, space and variety of materials that encourage all forms of play.

IV. Teachers as responders: When teachers verbally describe children's actions and words or ask questions about the role or theme, they provide feedback on what the children are doing and saying.

V. Teachers as models: Sometimes teachers should actively join the play and model a particular behaviour or role relevant to the ongoing play theme. In this way, they can teach individuals or groups of children a needed play skills or behavior.

VI. Teachers as mediators: Teacher's role as mediator is critical in helping children construct meaning from the play experiences. The teacher serves as a bridge between children's initial understanding of a concept of event and their deeper understanding as a result of direct experience with that concept or event.

2.2.11 Factors Influencing Pre-Primary School 'Teachers in use of Play as a Teaching Strategy

Type of School and Play

Work place environment affects how individuals feel about their jobs and can influence their working habits. Work environment has much of profound impact on job performance as does the salary. Similarly, the type of school environment whether public or private school, influences teachers' teaching habits and their general teaching performance. Global studies indicate that the type of school influences teachers' attitude towards teaching (Ezewu, 2014; Kinuthia, 2009). According to Good and Brophy (2016), a school's physical and social environment as well as type of school's management constitute what they referred to as teaching and learning situation. The teaching and learning situation affects a person's attitude towards task performance and task design. The pressure from school management and socio-economic context of the school. influences teachers and compel them to behave in a particular manner. Ajzen (2013) claimed that human behaviour is rational and always under his/her conscious control depending on the way he perceives his environment. Similarly, Hackett (2014) analyzing Herzberg's Motivation Hygiene Theory, concurs with the theorist's major argument that, individual's behaviour and his ultimate job performance is influenced by the context of environment and a person's relationship to the context. Okumbe (2016) stated

that educational managers should provide environments which will enhance pre-primary school teachers to use their skills autonomously for the betterment of their institutions. Given that the type of school influences teachers performance and teaching behaviors significantly, there is need to carry out an empirical study to find out whether the type of school affects pre-primary school teachers* teaching strategy.

Teachers' Motivation

Motivation as a process initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviour. Basically, motivation is what causes us to act. It involves social and cognitive forces that activate a

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particular behaviour of the individual in his/her everyday life. Studies have indicated that motivational factors such as supervisory practices and other working conditions do influence individual's morale and performance towards a particular task (Strage, 2013: Forman, Norris. Caden & Addson. 2012). Hackett (2014) and Cole (2017) while writing on motivation theories, concur with the basic argument in the Herzberg's (1959) Motivation Hygiene Theory that, a person's attitude and job performance are determined by two major factors which he referred to as …motivators…" and ..satisfiers". Motivators include such aspects as personal achievement, recognition and responsibilities, while satisfiers entailed aspects tend to influence the manner and quality of the job. This study sought to establish whether recognition, supervisory practices and working conditions influence pre-primary school teachers to use play as a teaching strategy. Mamoria and Gankar (2001) writing on Elton Mayo's (2016) Human Relation Theory, agreed with his basic premise that it is important for managements to understand the needs of workers and social aspect of work performance and that failure or success of the organization is directly related to the extent to which an individual is motivated. Kinuthia (2009) on conducting a study on the determinants of pre-school teachers' attitudes towards teaching in Thika Municipality in Kenya, found out that motivation can be improved by enriching the job of an individual. There is no documented evidence showing that a study has been conducted on motivation and use of play as a teaching strategy. This study therefore intended to find out whether motivation affects teachers" use of play as a teaching strategy.

Teachers' Training Status

A trained teacher will avoid a method like the "jug" and "mug' where the teacher is the "jug" who fills the knowledge to a passive child who is the "mug". The danger of such a method is the perpetuation of a situation where the school is full of teaching and no learing. Training as an educational process enhances learning and reinforcement of the existing knowledge and

most significantly it enables time to think and consider what new: options can help to improve the effectiveness at work. The nursery school teachers are entrusted with massive responsibility on helping children to grow physically, emotionally and socially. Pre-primary school teachers should undergo training so that they can be occupied with the skills required to cope with the demands of the young children. Training will also ensure provision, expansion and improvement of quality and relevant education. Through the training, teachers will develop professional attitudes, skills and knowledge to adapt the learning environment (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

A study conducted by Lyabwene (2010) in Tanzania on the relationship between pre-primary school education policy and actual practice, revealed that teachers" professional qualifications appear to influence the quality of classroom interaction more than physical setting and resources. Much of teachers' self-esteem and behaviours come from competencies. Self-competency is not given by others, but it comes from knowing that one can do certain things. It is belief in oneself and his/her competence (Evans, 2015) Judge (2013), in his core-self evaluations model argued that one's self-disposition towards job performance is determined by general self-efficacy, which is a belief in one's own competence in performing a behaviour. Teachers who have undergone ECE training are more enlightened on such important educational issues like the curriculum of the ECE programme, philosophy of education, sociology of education and educational psychology. Despite the importance of teachers undergoing training, the minimum academic requirements to train as a pre-primary school teacher in Tanzania are a standard seven certificate or lowest Division IV in form Four (BEST. 2009) These minimum academic qualifications are likely to affect the ECE teachers. particularly their ability and confidence to articulate child cantered issues which are relevant un teaching and learning in pre-primary schools. A study by Maloti (2015) indicated that one of the conscripts of Early Childhood Care and Education in Kenya. is the method of recruitment

to training. Further, the way the pre-primary school teachers are supported and evaluated by the public during and after training holds back the progress of the programme. Swadener, Kabiru and Njenga (2002) further argued that teachers working in ECE should have sufficient academic background to give them the intellectual and personal moral strength to articulate issues related to their profession.

A study by Ng'asike (2004) on teachers' use of play as a medium of bridging pre-school children's mathematics experiences in Kasarani division in Kenya, showed that, cadres of teachers who join certificate training level in ECE are rated by society as low level academically because the profession is not expected to have highly qualified people. The same study by Ng'asike (2004) revealed training levels to have positive influence on teachers" tendencies in using child cantered teaching approaches. Training enhances teachers" attitudes, raises activity level and also directs the quality services delivered (Kinuthia, 2009). In the light of these studies, this study sought to investigate whether the teachers' training influences the use of play as a teaching strategy.

Availability of Play Materials Educational facilities and instructional material are essential because they make teaching more effective and meaningful. It increases learner's motivation and concentration span and simplifies concept taught. Lack of instructional materials could negatively affect the learning process. This could 'be highly detrimental especially to children in early childhood education centres who need a variety of materials to reinforce or capture new experiences. Waithaka (as cited in Jones 2011). defines play resources in a instructional materials could negatively affect the learning process. This could be highly detrimental especially to children in early childhood education centres. who need a vanety materials to reinforce or capture new experiences. Waithaka (as cited in Jones 2011), defines play resources in a pre primary school setting as anything natural or artificial, real or imaginative, visual or invisible, big or small, structured or unstructured, props or loose parts, which a child or a

teacher or groups can use for teaching, fantasy, recreation, encourage creativity or can be used to enrich their play. Nani (2016) studying factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards teaching social science and ethics, argued that without the necessary tools even the best and most experienced teacher is handicapped. In general government and society have to support the programme in offering appropriate materials for teaching and learning.

Children in the nursery schools have limited experience and less developed abilities to cope with abstract ideas. Saunders (2017) when stressing the importance of using variety of instructional materials observed that: "People receive experience though all the five senses (touch, taste, smell hearing and sight). If you can appeal to more than one sense at a time your message is likely to be understood and accepted more permanently. Different materials appeal to different people. When you plan your work, don't concentrate on memory work alone. but on hearing, seeing. touching, doing and making" (p 271). Applied to early childhood learning. this argument is relevant because much of the children's knowledge is attained by coming into contacts with objects and situations which always give them a new experience. Teachers have to allow children to participate freely in activities of the own choice and also have to organize instructional materials at free choice activity corners. Omwondho (1984) observes that educational materials provide teachers and pupils with psychological and physical comfort. Similarly, Sifuna, (2017) ported out that instructional materials in a teaching environment were a major determinant of failure or success in the teaching or learning process. It is therefore important to enrich children's experience with numerous objects in order to give them opportunities to manipulate them. In a study by Kimengi (2015) on determinants of primary school teacher's commitment in teaching from three districts; Keiyo Marakwet, Nyeri and Kakamega in Kenya, teachers were asked to rank eight important factors that influence their non-commitment to teaching. Slow process of ordering and supplying instructional material was ranked number one and number two by men and women respectively. These findings

demonstrated the importance of play materials in teaching and learning process especially in pre-primary school children. Instructional resources are key to teaching in pre-primary schools and teachers need to have sufficient indoor and outdoor play materials. Ng'asike (2004) commented that pre-primary school teachers tend to actively engage play materials in their teaching when the teaching and learning environment is conducive. In addition, a study by Sifuna (1986) revealed that parents and community support for putting adequate facilities. providing extra books and teaching materials were important not only in raising the standard of teaching and learning but also boosted teachers" morale in teaching activities.

Teachers' Experience

Different scholars have different opinions on whether the numbers of teaching years have an influence on teachers' attitude and self-efficacy (Branyon, 2002; Ndegwa, 2015). A study by Aiken (2015) on whether experience influences teacher's attitude towards arithmetic revealed that experienced teachers had more positive attitude towards the subject than the less experienced teachers. Good and Brophy's (2015) opinion on the effect of experience on behaviour asserted that people confident of their abilities will seek challenge while those who lack confidence will avoid it. However, another study by White book as cited in Kinuthia (2009) gave contradicting conclusions. It suggested that the number of years of experience is not a good indicator of quantifying teachers* attitude or behavior in using or disusing a particular teaching approach. A person's past success or failure determines his/her future response to the same task or activity (Sifuna, 2017). In this study, it was expected that teachers who had experienced positive results in the use of play as a teaching strategy would reinforce the play use behaviour in teaching and learning sessions. Therefore, the need to establish whether the number of teaching years influences teaching strategy guided the study.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical studies were reviewed on play activities inculcated in instruction, technique employed when inculcating play in instruction, impact of play on the development of pre-school pupils, barriers to effective inculcation of play in instruction and role of teachers in solving barriers in the inculcation of play in instruction.

2.3.1 Play Activities Inculcated in Instruction

It is important that teachers incorporate play activities in curriculum. Some of the play activities employ in instruction are discussed below; Free play is student centred play, guided by the students. The students choose how they are going to play and what to play with. There is room for much imagination and creativity in this type of play (Aleke, 2011).

Structured play as teacher centred. guided by the teacher (Bodiova & Leong, 2014). The teacher sets guidelines based on academic content or social skills. The teacher takes control of the play environment by structuring it in such a way that guides students to learn the specific content (Bodrova & Leong, 2014). The game has a defined format, time period, and rules determined in advance.

Creative play involves children exploring and using their bodies and materials to make and do things and to share their feelings, ideas and thoughts (Bodrova & Leong, 2014). They enjoy being creative by dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play-dough and clay, and using their imaginations (Bodrova & Leong, 2014).

Physical play involves children developing, practicing and refining bodily movements and control (Ezenwa, 2018)- It includes whole body and limb movements, co-ordination and balance. These activities involve physical movements for their own sake and enjoyment (Ezenwa, 2018). Children gain control over their gross motor skills first before refining their fine motor skills. Language play involves children playing with sounds and words. It includes unrehearsed and spontaneous manipulation of these, often with rhythmic and repetitive

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elements (Ezenwa, 2018). Children like playing with language enjoying patterns, sounds and nonsense words. They also love jokes and funny stories.

Small world play involves children using small-scale representations of real things like animals, people, cars, and train sets as play props (Kanokwam & Zoe 2013). Socio-dramatic play involves children playing with other children and/or adults. It provides opportunities for children to make friends, to negotiate with others, and to develop their communication skills (Kanokwam & Zoe, 2013). This play helps extend language. The ability to write stories also has its roots in socio-dramatic play.

Technique Employed when Inculcating Play in Instruction.

According to Aleke (2011), play method involves dramatization of learning experiences through the use of objects and symbols so as to attain effective teaching and learning. This is because it incorporates activities such as role-playings, simulation and dramatization. These activities do not only help to make lesson lively but also make pupils feel part of the lesson Therefore, teachers employ techniques such as role play, dramatization and stimulation during inculcation of play in instruction. Role playing is a technique that can be applied by the classroom teacher (Aleke, 2011). It involves pupils acting out real situation in a society, in the classroom situation. The teacher can employ this technique to help the pupils develop interpersonal values in the society (Aleke, 2011). In designing role play, Kanokwam and Zoe (2013) described the following processes to be pre-eminent:

1. Determination of the learning objectives of role play: the learning obeluses can be theoretical as well as practical and can determine the key concepts that are taught in the course, the key event or situation that is the focus of the course:

2. Choose a scenario or situation form realities that highlight the key concepts of the topic. By re-enacting events from reality, pupils are able to deepen the understanding of real-life situation

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3. Consider the various stakeholders and their perspective and adapt the situation to the classroom.

Moreover, simulation technique is another technique employed when using play method of teaching in teaching and learning process. Agbo (2017) described simulation as a fictitious but realistic method of representation of the real world in which learners can deal with significant social and historical situations. In the same way, Ezenwa, (2018) sees simulation as either making pretense of or reproducing a situation or events. This is because children can easily pretend to be drivers. parents. policemen, and teachers and so on. Then the teacher can ask pupils to participate in plays representing real life situation when teaching a particular concept. In initiating simulation, the teacher presents an artificial problem situation or events that represent some aspect of reality (Ezenwa, 2018). This is because in simulation, any serious risk or complication that may be associated with the real life phenomenon is removed. In addition, the level of abstraction or complexity is purposefully reduced so that pupils may become directly involved with the concept (Aleke, 2011). It also allows for types of experimentation that cannot take place in the real-life situation. The simulation technique may involve the use of models, game formats, structure role play, or an interactive computer or video programme (Aleke, 2011).

Impact of Play on the Development of Pre-school Pupils

The relevance of play in early childhood educational practices is definitely not in doubt when it comes to Ghana's early childhood educational programme. Indeed, play in some quarters is equated to early childhood education and the two are deemed inseparable (Genishi, Blaise & Ryan, 2012). education and the two are deemed inseparable (Genishi, Blaise & Ryan, 2012). Aside being described as a vehicle for learning, Wood (2004) presents play as a means through which children are able to demonstrate learning on their own. The literature on play being Â« tool offbeat, the most important tool for learning at the early childhood level abounds.

For Miller and Almon (2009), there is a direct relationship between academic performance and play. These studies are demonstrable attestation of the direct relationship between play and learning. Play provides children the opportunity to discover the world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Also, children's play promotes and enhances socio-emotional development, cognitive and physical skills that cannot be taught through Total classroom instruction (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007). One important aspect of children's play to be considered is the use of play in early years setting. Contrarily, combining play in the teaching process in the early years setting, there is the need for greater confidence among practitioners in approaching problems without fear and taking risks needed in the search for new ideas to help the development of children. In contrast, play is often regarded as cognitively challenging process, which requires the child to make use ability, memory, signs and symbols, cultural tools which includes development of language, social skills such as negotiations. Communication, planning and sharing and prediction (Ndegwa, 2015). Many skills that are needed for later life are developed through play and also are very important in a pre-school setting. Children will continue to make use of different learning situations, experiences and in remembrance for further learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) an its report for the year 2009 stressed that children. no matter their age, love 'to play and that play provides children the opportunity to develop physical competence. The association further indicate that play aids children to develop and take control of themselves. Wood (2013) presents play as a context in which children are able to demonstrate their own learning. Through the process of using real life experiences in their play, the children are coming to terms with their reality and making sense of life as they know it (Bhroin, 2017). Expressing this through art or play is important for the child's emotional, cognitive and social development (Bhroin, 2017). This type of play also creates meaningful connections to the child's life and gives them a way to express it. On an educational level the

children are able to express experiences, thoughts, fears, dreams and ideas in a safe and fulfilling way. which in turn develops skills of self-expression and communication that will benefit them throughout their entire lives (Bhroin, 2017). Research has shown that play provides great opportunities and promotes active agency. participation and self-expression among children (Smith, 2007). Play has a leading role not only in kindergarten but as a fundamental lifestyle and way of learning for the children. Play improves children's imagination and helps them to see other people's perspectives. Pre-school settings which offer quality experiences are ones which encourage children's interactions, communications and participation in the teaching and learning process (Alderson. 2008). According to Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva. Muttock. Gilden, and Bell (2010) practitioners or teachers should utilize play pedagogy as a basis for instruction. thus, providing quality teaching and learning.

Another benefit of children's play is the development of language (Smith, 2015). The emergence of children's language is through interactions with peers, teachers and adult's whiles playing. The interactions with play materials also increase children's language development. Play helps children to interact with the environment and learn as well. Therefore, as children imitate the behaviour of others and interact with the environment they acquire more and better communication skills (Smith, 2015). Seemingly, as children are motivated to play, they become more linguistically and their confidence level are enhanced. Through play children develop self-regulations. Bodrova (2008) affirms that, play promotes children's intentional behaviors and support their school readiness. Additionally, children develop regulations skills such as turns-taking, cooperation and unity through play. Play helps children to develop physically. Play activities help children to develop and have control over their fine and gross motor skills. Research has shown that through play children develop hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness necessary for learning (Sandseter, 2007)- Children manipulations skills are refined and that very important for sorting, matching and grouping during play activities. For instance.

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the ability for children to master a skill in an activity is through play. Through play children are able to make friends. While interacting with each other they develop social skills. The importance of children's play is regarded as a tool for holistic development which facilitate further learning (Sollars, 2003). The children are able to show their feelings and thoughts through play. It also improves their imagination and helps them to see other people perspectives from a wider view. Providing children with lots of opportunities to play and ability to engage in playful activities will encourage children to learn and enjoy the school environment. A study was conducted by Ezema (2002) on the influence of play method on the achievement of pre-primary school children in mathematics. The study was guided by one research question and one hypothesis. Experimental design was adopted and the subjects were 50 in number. The study was two group. the experimental and control. The subjects were randomly selected: the experimental group was taught using play method while the traditional method was adopted in the control group. The result revealed that the experimental group participated more actively in the class than the control group. The play-method was discovered to have a significant influence on the achievement of the children. The study however, recommended among other things that, the play method should be the dominant method in the pre-school level.

2.3.2 Barriers to Effective Inculcation of Play in Instruction

According to Kinuthia (2013), teachers are unable to employ preschoolers in play activities because, play facilities are not available, and early childhood education centres lack leisure facilities, play materials and physical infrastructure. Russell (2008) noted lack of available data examining children's use of time and space, and therefore exploring whether children's

time to play has increased or decreased in the UK is difficult to track. However, evidence from the suggests that today's children have significantly less time for free play than previous generations. Tsung-Hui and Wei-Ying (2008) illustrates that, Early Childhood teachers set up appropriate stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not

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follow up with supervision, supportive, reactive interactions with the children as they play. These authors described this as the early childhood error. Some teachers find it difficult to participate in children's play for fear of disrupting the flow of children's play activities.

'Teacher's involvement in play enriches children's play and develops children's intellectual and social skills. On the other hand, if teachers give more structured cognitive activities through play and take over the control of play at that time teacher intervention interrupts children's play (Tsung-Hui & Wei-Ying. 2008).

Although practitioners value the role of play in skills development and learning among children, they are unaware of how to conceptualize it in an instructional manner Saracho and Spodek (as cited in Haney & Bissonnette, 2011). Practitioners should also be more knowledgeable and interested in children's play both in content and pedagogy Nani and Kimani (2013) reported a study on investigation of play facilities and socio-motor skills development of pre-primary school and primary school pupils in Akwaibom State. The research design was survey design while the population consisted of teachers of nursery two and primary one in 324 public and 185 private primary schools. A sample of six hundred and sixty (four hundred public and 250 private) primary school teachers were selected using stratified random sampling method. Person product moment correlation statistics was adopted in analyzing the data on relationship between play facilities and pupil's development of social motor skills in both public and private primary schools in Akwaibom state. The paper revealed that no public schools employed play facilities in teaching and learning while the private primary schools that utilized play facilities lacked play space. The paper recommended that primary schools (private and public) should as a matter of policy employ play facilities and provide play space in the teaching and learning process and this is in line with this study which tries to find out the extent of utilization of play method of teaching and pre-primary in our education zone.

2.3.3 Roles of Teachers in Solving Barriers in the Inculcation of Play in Instruction

The early childhood teacher is the facilitator of play in the classroom. The teacher facilitates play by providing appropriate indoor and outdoor play environments. Safety is, of course, the primary concern. Age and developmental levels must be carefully considered in the design and selection of materials. Early childhood administrators have the task of setting up learning environments that encourage more meaningful play for children by developing constructive play in the school (Howard, Jenvey & Hill, 2006). Constructive play is a type of play that involves children using hands-on inquiry based learning, and exploring materials to invent and discover new ways of learning (Drew, Christie, Johnson, Meckley & Nell. 2008). Therefore, the administrators should provide young children the needed appropriate amount of time, and open-ended materials to make this type of learning valuable to them (Drew et al., 2008). The early childhood educators have the

responsibility of linking constructive play with other types of play in the classroom, such as dramatic play, and it should be connected to activities in the school's curriculum for it to be more educational (Drew et al., 2008).

As facilitators of children's play, teachers should closely observe children during play periods not only for assessment purposes, as stated earlier, but also to facilitate appropriate social interactions and motor behaviors. It is important that children be the decision-makers during play, choosing what and where to play, choosing roles for each player, and choosing how play will proceed. Occasionally, however, some children will need adult assistance in joining a play group, modifying behaviour, or negotiating a disagreement. Careful observation will help the teacher to decide when to offer assistance and what form that assistance should take. The role of the teacher is to select activities and organize the learning environment in such a way that creates a language rich environment (Tan & Gopinathan, 2000). This safe environment will encourage children to use freely the play materials and facilitate the development of oral, listening and speaking skills. Ziegler, Mitchell and Currie (2006) noted that skilled teachers,

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who are well trained in observing children, must consciously facilitate play and understand how play contributes to the child's mastery of concepts. The teacher should organize activities and materials that promote language development for use throughout the indoor and outdoor daily schedules. The teacher should establish an environment where language exploration and usage is encouraged. Language here should be used to develop reasoning skills (Ziegler, Mitchell, & Currie, 2006). This can be done through logical relationships and concepts, which should be presented in appropriate ways. Teachers have a variety of roles in supporting integration of children's play in early childhood education (ECE) curriculum (Kamerman. 2006). These roles include providing materials for play. encouraging high quality play, roles include providing materials for play structuring environments for play, modelling play and introducing children to new play opportunities. During planning and preparation, the teachers can arrange for physical places suitable for different types of play, find and provide accessories for play (dress props) and decide how play periods can fit into the daily routines and schedules of the school and class. Teachers in ECE are facilitators who need to engage children in multiple experiences to foster their all-round development. Proper time management in pre school leads to effective learning in class (Ndani & Kimani, 2010). Time management techniques have great implication for learning in pre-school and if implemented well, can go a long way to optimize time spent on instruction (Okumbe, 2016). The school administrator should provide space and appropriate periods for children to experience a holistic learning through play to sustain interest and development of languages skills. In many early childhood programmes across the country, time for play is dwindling away as pre-school teachers tend to spend time stressing on academic performance; however. this inhibits communication among learners that is enhanced through play In order to provide services for children. pre-school administrators are expected to be guided by the use of Early Childhood Development policy framework as a foundation for improved service delivery to preschool children. Bodrova (2008) also pointed out that

practitioners conceptualized children's play by using different activities to influence children to play. In play based teaching, the most important thing is not the satisfaction the child receives, but the objective use and the meaning of the playful activities deployed that the children are unaware. Practitioners use play in a wide range of activities such as sorting, pairing, matching, comparing, counting, shapes and many others to help the child reason logically, discover new ideas and develop interest in area later in life. Practitioners see themselves as pivotal support for children's play and in the teaching and learning situations.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Dependent Variable   **Independent Variable**
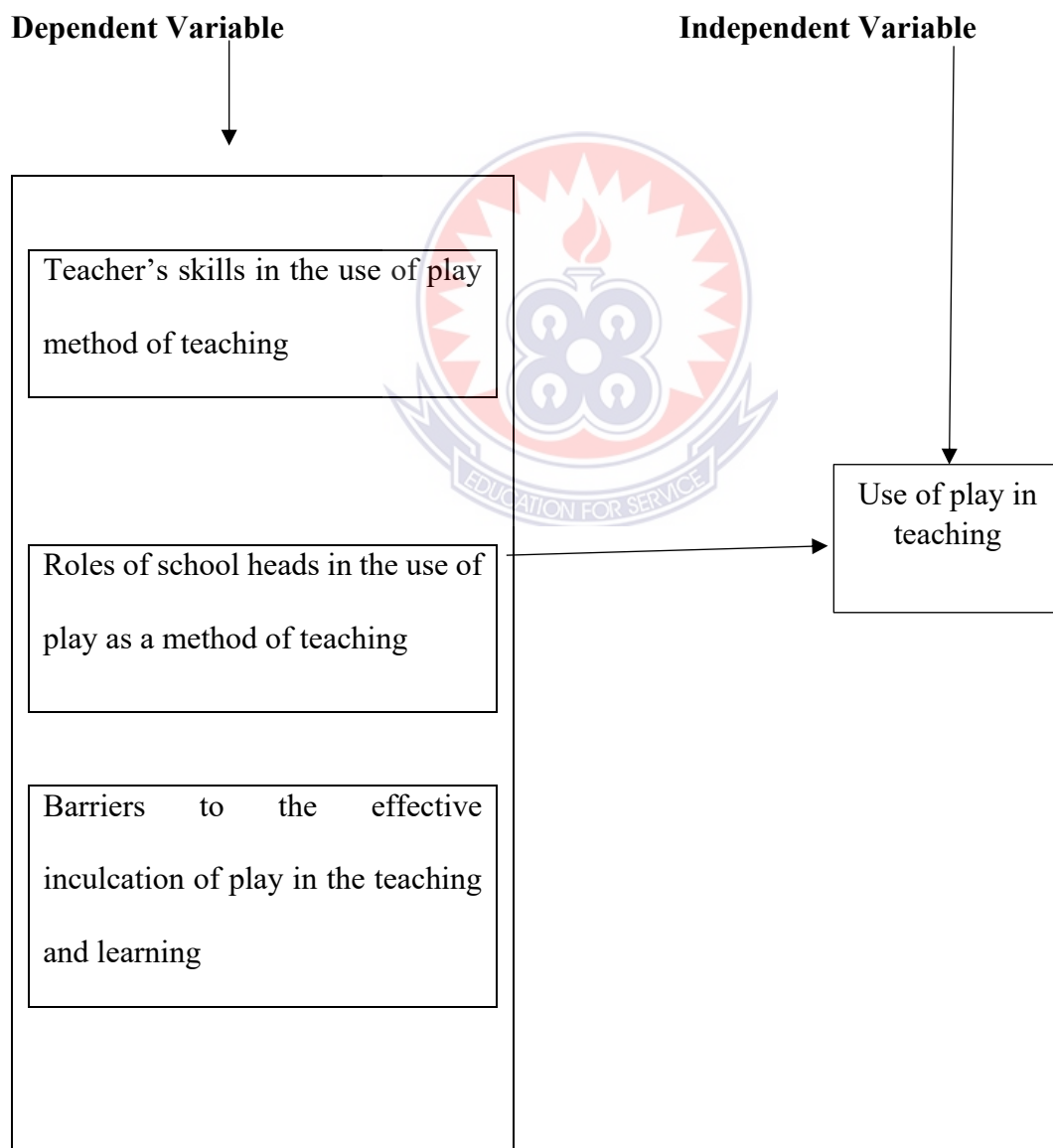
*Figure 1-***Conceptual Framework**
Source: Author's construction

2.5 Summary of the Related Literature Review

It is the responsibility of teachers to provide children with opportunities to play with toys and other play materials where they need to use their imaginations. That type of play is more beneficial than if children were to play with something that has only one purpose or meaning. A child learns best through their own interests and exploration of those interests. Educators need to find out the interests of their pupils and build a developmentally appropriate curriculum for that year around what the children are interested in Children need physical images of objects for them to be completely tuned into the activity.

In order for children to be entirely engaged in learning they need some kinesthetic movement as well which need to be provided by administrators of early childhood centres. From birth, children can benefit in many ways from movement. Along with movement. children need to have many opportunities with hands on learning through exploration and discovery at the early childhood centres. Young children also need to build communication skills and what better way to build these skills than to talk with other children in a dramatic play area. By doing this. children learn one-to-one correspondence with objects and other children, and by communicating through play children gain social-emotional concepts that will follow them throughout their lives. Moreover, most of these research studies and literature relates to geographical, cultural and social context outside Ghana. Hence, this study is carried out with the view of contributing to early childhood education knowledge in the Ghanaian context as well as to inform educators and concern parties on possible improvements to their classroom practices.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This study sought the role of early childhood teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction in the Ga West Metropolis. This chapter covers the research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection instrument, pre-testing, validity and reliability, data collection procedures and data processing and analysis that were used for the study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The pragmatic research paradigm was used for this study because is best suited for investigating the roles of early childhood teachers in integrating play in the teaching and learning process at the Ga West Municipality. Pragmatism focuses on finding practical solutions to real-world problems and emphasizes the research question rather than adherence to a specific philosophical stance (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This paradigm allows for the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the roles teachers play in integrating play-based learning.

In this study, the pragmatic paradigm enabled the researcher to explore the teachers' experiences, attitudes, and practices through qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, while also measuring the extent and impact of play integration using quantitative tools such as surveys or standardized assessments. The flexibility of pragmatism supported this combination, as it seeks to provide the best possible answers to the research questions by using multiple forms of data collection and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Furthermore, pragmatism was not bounded by the philosophical debates between positivism and interpretivism but rather values the practical outcome of the research. It is particularly relevant for this study, as the focus is on the effectiveness and real-world application of play in early childhood education. By employing a mixed methods approach, the pragmatic paradigm

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ensured that both the measurable outcomes (such as the improvements in learning outcomes) and the lived experiences of teachers (such as their challenges and successes in using play) are captured. This aligns with the view that reality is both objective and socially constructed, depending on the context and the problem at hand (Morgan, 2007).

Thus, a pragmatic approach will not only investigate what roles teachers play but also how effectively these roles facilitate learning through play. It supports the idea that both qualitative and quantitative insights are necessary for understanding the full scope of integrating play in early childhood education at Ga West Municipality, making the paradigm an ideal fit for this research.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the roles of early childhood teachers in integrating play into the teaching and learning process at the Ga West Municipality. The mixed methods approach aligns with the pragmatic paradigm, as it allows for the use of multiple data collection techniques to address different aspects of the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach is suitable because it provides a comprehensive understanding by gathering both numerical data (quantitative) and in-depth insights (qualitative) into teachers' practices and challenges.

The qualitative aspect will include interviews and classroom observations to explore the teachers' experiences, attitudes, and strategies in integrating play. The quantitative aspect will involve surveys and standardized assessments to measure the frequency and effectiveness of play-based activities in promoting learning outcomes. This combination offers a broader and deeper perspective on the research problem, ensuring the findings are both detailed and generalizable (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Research Design

A mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed for the study. Quantitative method is a systematic process of obtaining formal objective data to describe the variables and their relationships. It uses structured tools to generate numerical data and uses statistics to interpret, organize, and represent the collected data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2015). Quantitative method that employed questionnaire was used to gather data to answer the research questions two, three and four.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative method is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and seeks to interpret meaning from these data, helps us to understanding the phenomena under study through study of targeted populations or places. Qualitative method which used interview guide and observation was used to collect data to answer the research questions one and four.

The mixed method research is one that combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a single study. It emerged from the need to conduct research especially in studies of human behaviour that would provide a more complete picture of a particular phenomenon than either approach could do alone. As Creswell (2006) noted, researchers use the mixed method to expand an understanding from one method to another, and to converge or confirm findings from different data sources (Creswell, 2006). The rationale for this design was that the quantitative data and their qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants view in more depth. Priority is usually unequal and given to the quantitative data.

3.4 Study Area

The Ga West Municipality is located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, specifically to the north-west of the capital city, Accra. It is one of the 29 districts in the Greater Accra Region and covers an area of approximately 290 square kilometres (Ga West Municipal Assembly,

n.d.). The municipality is known for its diverse demographic composition, comprising various ethnic groups from within Ghana and beyond. It is a bustling area with a mix of urban and peri-urban settlements, characterized by both residential and commercial activities.

The Ga West Municipality is home to a significant population, largely made up of families and communities from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) census data, the population of the municipality was estimated to be over 200,000 residents (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). This population includes a substantial number of children in the early childhood age group, highlighting the importance of early childhood education services within the area. In terms of education, the Ga West Municipality hosts a range of public and private early childhood education centres, primary schools, and other educational institutions. These schools serve the educational needs of the local population, providing foundational learning experiences for children in their formative years. Early childhood education is recognized as a crucial stage in child development, laying the groundwork for future academic success and holistic growth.

The socio-economic context of the Ga West Municipality is diverse, reflecting both urban and peri-urban dynamics. While some areas exhibit higher levels of infrastructure development, access to resources, and economic opportunities, others face challenges such as limited access to basic services, inadequate infrastructure, and economic disparities. These socio-economic factors can significantly influence the quality of education available to children in the municipality. Within the Ga West Municipality, early childhood education centres play a vital role in providing foundational learning experiences for young children. These centres include both public and private preschools, kindergartens, and daycare facilities. They are staffed by early childhood educators who are responsible for facilitating the learning and development of children in their care.

The Ga West Municipality provides a rich and varied context for studying the roles of early childhood teachers in integrating play in the teaching and learning process. The diverse demographic profile, educational landscape, and socio-economic context offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by educators. By focusing on this area, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how early childhood teachers navigate the complexities of integrating play-based pedagogies in diverse educational settings.

3.5 Population

The target population in this study were all teachers, headteacher in the Ga West Municipality circuit of the Ghana Education Service. The Ga West Municipality circuit branch of Ghana Education Service report for 2022/2023 academic year indicates that the Municipality has Fifty-Eight (58) Public Preschools with One Hundred and One (101) preschool teachers. Therefore, the target population for the study was all the One Hundred and One (101) preschool teachers in the Municipality.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for this study was twenty-five (25) participants. The sample population of the study comprised twenty (20) preschool teachers, four (4) each from five (5) selected basic schools and five (5) headteachers, one (1) each from the (5) selected basic schools. In all there were twenty-five (25) participants from whom qualitative and quantitative insights were sought to produce the required information. Simple random was used to select the five Basic schools based on proximity while the criteria for the selection of twenty preschool teachers was based on longest years of teaching experience and higher academic qualification.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments the researcher used in the study for data collection was questionnaire for teachers.

3.7.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire was also used as a research instrument for the study. Questionnaire is a set of questions used to gather information in a research study (Burns & Grove, 2010). They are used to collect data in a statistical form. Researchers usually use questionnaires in order that they can make generalizations; therefore, questionnaire is usually used based on carefully selected samples (Burns & Grove, 2010). The questionnaire is made up of closed ended questions. Large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost effective way through the use of questionnaire (Burns & Grove, 2010). The limitation of questionnaire arises when the problem under investigation is emotional and there is no way to tell how truthful a respondent is being. Sometimes, there is a level of researcher imposition (Burns & Grove, 2010). The questionnaire for this study is made up of three sections. Section A was on play activities teachers engage pupils in during instruction and section B asked questions on the barriers to the inculcation of play in instruction. Section C also asked questions about views of teachers on improving the inculcation of play in instruction. Details of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix II

3.7.2 Pre-testing

A pre-test of the questionnaires was done using five teachers respectively at two selected early childhood education centres in the Ga West Metropolis. The questionnaire was pre-tested in order to test their reliability and validity as a data collection tools and to ensure its effectiveness. Pre-test also gave an estimate of the time to interview each individual and answering of each questionnaire. The participants in the pre-test study were similar to those in the main study but were excluded in the final study.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The data collection was carried out according to the research design developed for this study and throughout the research process, the researcher was conscious of enhancing the validity of

the study. The researcher conducted the research in an ethical manner by involving the teachers in the research process. In order to make the teachers comfortable, the researcher asked for their approval before engaging in the instruments.

A letter of introduction and approval from the University of Education, Winneba, Department of Early Childhood Education was sent to the metropolitan director of education of Ga West metropolitan to obtain permission before the start of data collection in the metropolis. The consents of the teachers were sought through verbal communication and provision of introduction letter when demanded before administering the questions, interview and observation in the selected early childhood centres. Confidentiality of the information collected during and after the collection of data was assured by avoiding the use of names and addresses of participants in the study. Participants were allowed to participate in the study voluntarily.

This study is based on real-life experiences, obtained through probing and in-depth interviews, questionnaire and classroom observations. One may argue that this study may be considered as truthful interpretations or descriptions of the respondent's experience. The researcher piloted the research in schools that were not part of the study. The pilot study assisted me to develop and test the adequacy of my research instruments; and to develop my research questions.

To ensure trustworthiness of findings, the researcher employed different procedures during the analysis and interpretation phases of this study. The researcher analysed all the classroom observations, field notes, individual interviews and use of questionnaire for each teacher to acquire a clear interpretation of their expressions and perceptions in an attempt to maximize authenticity. The researcher used multiple data collection instruments to provide data in order to strengthen a crystallization of meaning and interpretation. This resulted in the construction of a thick description of the teacher's real experiences concerning the inculcation of play in teaching. The researcher paid due attention to the development of the questionnaire to ensure that the questions elicited necessary information in accordance with the objectives of

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the study.

The instrument was able to identify the data required and their sources precisely in the pilot study (Waltz, Strickland & Lenz, 2015). For the overall items, the internal consistency of 0.672 was calculated by applying Cronbach's α that depicted that the instrument was reliable and consistent for data compilation of the current study. For the sections, Section A that measures play activities scored a Cronbach's α value of .723, for Section B which was on barriers scored a Cronbach's α value of .701. The last section which was on ways to improve play in instruction scored a Cronbach's α value of .625. The Cronbach's α value of 0.60 is acceptable for the reliability of a questionnaire.

3.8.1 Validation of Interviews

Great care was taken to ensure that items on the interview guide are directly related to the purpose of the research. In addition, a "member checking" process was used to validate all interviews; Member checking is a process whereby respondents/interviewees are asked to verify the accuracy of the research report. In this study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the recordings were transcribed, copies of the transcripts were forwarded to the respondents requesting them to verify the accuracy of the information.

Respondents were asked to modify, revise and/or amend the transcript as necessary before any part of the transcript was used in the study

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

In the collection of data for this study, procedures were followed for interview, administering of questionnaire. Before the start of data collection, letters of approval were sent to head teachers of the selected schools and the researcher sought the consent of all participants through verbal communication. A pre-test of the instruments was conducted in other schools that were not part of this study.

3.9.1 Questionnaire

The researcher used the interview guide to ask the teachers questions. The collection of data was face-to-face between me and the respondents of the study. The researcher scheduled the interviews at the offices of the head teachers in the various early childhood centres at 9am for five days. Also, the researcher informed the participants about protection of the information they gave out. Audio recording was used to record the conversation between me and the teachers. Each respondent was interviewed separately and responses were recorded and entered appropriately in the questionnaire in order to avoid error in coding of the responses. The researcher used pseudonyms such as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9 and A10, to substitute the identity of the respondents. The session of each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

3.10 Data Processing and Analysis

For the data collected through interviews and questionnaire, the researcher used qualitative content analysis to analyse the data.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative content analysis is the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes. The transcribed interviews were read through several times to obtain the sense of the whole data and the recorded interview was listened repeatedly in a sole attempt to discover any recurring feature of the talk organized which was not noted in the previous listening. The data under study was grouped into themes and sub themes, which was created through interpretation of the contents of the sentences acquired from the data transcribed.

Table 3.1-Themes Creating

Research Questions	Themes
Rq1: What play activities do teachers engage pupils in during instruction	Play activities teachers engaged in
Rq2: How are teachers supported in the use of play in instruction?	Provision of Play Materials, Supervision, Training and Education, Motivation Barriers
Rq3: What are the barriers to the inculcation of play in instruction?	Teachers on improving the inculcation of play in instruction

According to Mugenda (2012), thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality. The researcher incorporated categorized, related codes in reporting the teacher's views. These themes reflected themes, which the researcher shall use in the discussion of the topic. They were separated by dots (.) indicating that each part has been taken from one identified participant. The strongest example was used to represent the other similar examples.

For the data collected through administering of questionnaire, the researcher analysed the data using descriptive statistics obtained from the use of Statistical Product for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Version 25 and inferential statistics, specifically of chi-square and weighted average. Responses of the questions in the questionnaire were entered into the SPSS and the descriptive statistics of the SPSS was used to analyse the entered data for each of the research questions. Responses were reported using descriptive statistics.

To gather evidences on the research questions for the study, the selected teachers were made to rate their responses using Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Not Sure (NS), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). Using means, the scales were scored as Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =4, Not Sure 3. Agree = 4, Strongly Agree =5. A criterion value of 3.0 was established for the scale. To obtain the criterion value (CV=3.00), the scores were added together and divided by

the number scale (5+4+3+2+1= 15/5=3.0). To understand the mean scores, items/statements on research questions that scored a mean of **0.00 to 2.99** was regarded as loose practice. Those items/statements that scored a mean from **3.00 to 5.00** was regarded as high practice among the head teachers and teachers. This interpretation is only applicable to all the research questions **(QR 2-RQ4)**.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

The following ethical consideration were considered for the study

3.11.1 Informed consent

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

3.11.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is explained as not disclosing information from the participant in any way that might identify that individual or that might enable the individual to be traced. The researcher used coding abstracted data with unique identifiers rather than names and masking features of specific cases, institutions or settings that may make them recognisable even without names. The researcher considered the way the data was protected from unauthorised persons. Passwords were also used to protect the data on soft copies.

3.11.3 Anonymity

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

3.11.4 Harm to participants

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

3.11.5 Debriefing

In addition, theoretical validation was achieved through regular presentation of emerging conclusions with competent peers familiar with the setting and the research study so as to explore and clarify meanings and interpretations. For my study, the researcher had invited two colleagues with early childhood background as my competent peers to assist me in clarifying data and organising themes into categories.

3.11.6 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the checking of data from multiple and different sources such as interviews, observations, and journals which served as means of corroborating evidence derived at different times and by different modes. The triangulation process for my study began at the commencement of data analysis, after data from all two sources were collected to ensure a

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coherent description of what was observed or discovered. Data from the three sources were compared and contrasted to seek out areas of consistencies and/or contradictions, which were then noted and highlighted in the data analysis process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Overview

The analysis and interpretation of data were carried out based on the results of the four (4) research questions formulated for the study. Ten (10) teachers were interviewed for the study. This implies that out of the targeted sample of 130, a total of 125 questionnaires were retrieved for the study. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages). The research findings are presented based on the research questions formulated for the study.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Research Questions

4.1.1 Play activities teachers engage pupils in during instruction

Elsewhere in the literature, it is evident that teachers engage pupils in play activities during instruction at the early childhood. This could help the teachers to fully develop the pupils holistically. This made the researcher to accumulate evidence on teachers engaging pupils in play activities during instruction at the early childhood in the case of Ga West Municipality of Ghana. The accrued results are in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 – Results on Play Activities Teachers Engage Pupils duringInstruction

Statements	MS	SDS	MR
	Criterion Value=3.00		
I allow all children to play with toys of theirchoice despite their gender	4.24	.623	1st
Teachers interact fully with children during play to enhance safe play	4.14	.233	2nd
I engage children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with ball outside the classroom	4.13	.017	3rd
I use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction	4.11	.057	4th
I use dramatic play during instruction	4.09	.283	5th
I integrate games and songs in the classroom learning activities	4.06	.123	6th
I use nature and science play activities	4.02	.142	7th
Teachers plan for lessons such as role plays to strengthen children during play	4.01	.123	8th
I use television, video and/or Computer play activities	3.99	.252	9th
Mean of means	4.08	.201	

Source: Field Survey, 2023   (n=125)

Key-

MS= Mean Statistic

SDS =Standard Deviation Statistic

MR=Means Ranking

n=Sample Size

Table 1 presents results on the play activities teachers engage pupils during instruction at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. The results show that to a large extent, most early childhood teachers in the Ga West Municipality engaged pupils in play activities during instruction. However, it was found that some of the items scored higher mean than others. This was apparent after the obtained average score was found to be larger than the CV of 3.00 *(M=4.08, SD=.201, n=125).*

Focusing on some items, it was found that most of the teachers allowall children to play with toys of their choice despite their gender *(M=4.24,*

SD=.623, n=125). This implies that most of the teachers take into consideration the toys of their pupils since toys is one of the key play activities. It was again found that teachers interact fully with children during play to enhance safe play *(M=4.14, SD=.133, n=125).*

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

Another found play activity was that they use dramatic play duringinstruction *(M=4.09, SD= .283, n = 125).* It was again indicated by most of the teachers that they integrate games and songs in the classroom learningactivities *(M = 4.06, SD = .123, n = 125).* The use of nature and science play activities was also found to be used by most of the teachers in the Ga West MunicipalityNorth Metropolis *(M=4.02, SD=.142, n=125).*

How teachers are being support in the use of play in instruction

The respondents of this study indicated that they support teachers in the inculcation of play in teaching pre-school pupils by providing play materials, supervision of teachers and pupils, training and education of teachers and motivation of teachers to ensure conducive play

environment for pupils.

Theme 1: Provision of Play Materials

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

> *"……….Hmmmmmmm……I believe that provision of play materials is essential in teaching and learning process. Because of this, last year, I was provided with play materials such as the number box, word box and the letter soup for the pre-school"* ***(Respondent A1)***.

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

> *"………my dear, the issue of provision of play materials, has beenthe fundamental challenge in most Ghanaian schools. You see, there is no money to buy the expensive play materials. However, I have provided improvised locally made play materials such as cartyre, ropes, play drums, balls and water bobbles"* ***(Respondent A9)***

In another encounter, one of the teachers had this to point out….

> *"…ooooooo my sister, the truth is that since I don't have the resources to make a play area, I have sought to use physical activities such as singing, running, clapping, playing of football and ampe"* ***(Respondent A4)***.

Theme 2: Supervision

The issue of supervision was carved out from the main theme. That is teachers supervise learners in the use of play.

> *"…my sister, as for me, I see supervision as one of the key issues in the work I do. I believe that supervision changes learners' attitude and behaviour in their learning process. Because of this,I always supervise pupils as they engage in play activities"* ***(Respondent A4)***

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

> *"....With the issues of supervision, For me I always observe the learners as they engage in play activities and directthem on where they should focus to make the play activities interesting for the themselves"* **(Respondent A3)**.

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

> *"....eeeeiiiii for me, I do not joke with supervision, I have strongbelieve in supervision. For example, during play lessons, I participate in the play activities but sometimes too I observe learners as they lead their mates to play. I always link the play activities to the curriculum"* **(Respondent A7)**.

Theme 3: Training and Education

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

> *"...Just last two weeks, a workshop was organized. We were trained on play lesson preparation and linking of play activities to thecurriculum and how we can improvise for unavailable play materials"...* **(Respondent A7)**.

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

> *"……my sister and friend, you know what, because of technology and modernization, I normally go on the Internet and watch videos on training and education of play based materials. Therefore I use my research to engage my learners to ensure holistic development of the child….."* **(Respondent A10)**.

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Theme 4: Motivation

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

> *"...In my quest to motivate my teachers to support the use of play in instruction, I allow teachers to use play in their lessons and I have strictly directed the effective usage of play contact hours. Ido not concentrate on teaching without play…"* **(Respondent A10)**.

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

> *"……In my own capacity as a head teacher, I employ motivation to encourage my teachers to use play activities in theirclassrooms. In doing this, I always motivate my teachers to use play activities in teaching by providing all the play materials they will need and space for the activities…."* **(Respondent A07)**.

4.1.2 The barriers to the inculcation of play in instruction

It is apparent for one to note that some barriers could limit teachers' ability to engage pupils in play activities. This made the researcher to ascertainthese barriers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. The accrued results are presented in Table 4.2.

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Table 4.2 – Results on the Barriers to Effective Inculcation of Play inInstruction

MS Statements Criterion value=3.00	MS	SDS	MR
There is no enough play materials for children to access during play	4.98	.231	1st
There is no enough space for children's play	4.87	.344	2nd
Misconception of parents about learning through play limit teachers use of play in instruction	4.71	.345	3rd
Lack of in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of play in instruction	4.69	.342	4th
Curriculum emphasises more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction	4.68	.453	5th
Learners are not provided with adequate time to play	4.45	.229	6th
Teachers are less knowledgeable and less interested in use of play in instruction	4.34	.563	7th
School head teachers do not support play inculcation in instruction	2.14	.733	8th
Teachers are not motivated to use play	2.09	.854	9th
Mean of means	4.11	.454	

Source: Field Survey, 2018   (n=125)

Key-

MS= Mean Statistic

SDS =Standard Deviation Statistic

MR=Means Ranking

n=Sample Size

Table 4.2 presents the barriers to effective inculcation of play in teachingand learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. The results show that generally, the inability of the teachers to use play activities is due to some barriers. This was glaring after the obtained average score wasfound to be larger than the CV of 3.00 (*M=4.11, SD=.454,*

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n=125).

Some of the profound barriers were that there are no enough play materials for children to access during play and this hinder their ability to inculcate play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana (*M=4.98, SD=.231, n=125).* Another barrier found was that there is no enough space for children's play and this inhibits the teachers ability to inculcate play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana (*M=4.87, SD=.344, n=125).* It was again found that misconception of parents about learning through play limit teachers use ofplay in instruction *(M=4.71, SD=.345, n=125).*

Inadequate in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of play in instruction was identified as another challenge *(M=4.69, SD=.342, n=125).*

The teachers further asserted that curriculum emphasises more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction and this serves as a barrier to inculcating play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana (*M=4.68, SD=.453, n=125).*

Results from the teachers further suggest that learners are not provided with adequate time to play and this create a barrier to inculcate play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana (*M=4.45, SD=.229, n=125).* More evidences from the teachers suggested that some teachers are less knowledgeable and less interested in theuse of play in instruction and this poses a challenge in their quest to inculcate play in teaching and learning at the early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana (*M=4.34, SD=.563, n=125).*

4.1.3 Views of teachers on improving the inculcation of playing instruction

This aspect of the study was to assess the teacher's view on improving the inculcation of play in instruction. To achieve this, means and standard deviation were used to estimate the results.

The responses are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 – Results on the Ways of Improving Inculcation of Play in Instruction

Statement	MS	SDS	MR
	Criterion value=		3.00
Education directors and teachers must provide appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments	4.83	.563	1st
Authorities making available play materials for play activities	4.76	.536	2nd
Ministry of education must organize in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of play in instruction	4.73	.217	3rd
Teachers must model play and introduce children to new play opportunities	4.69	.323	4th
Teachers must ensure proper time management to ensure play is inculcated in instruction	4.56	.643	5th
Mean of means	4.71	.456	

Source: Field Survey, 2023   (n=125)

Key-

MS= Mean Statistic

SDS =Standard Deviation Statistic
MR=Means Ranking
n=Sample Size

The results show that generally there are some ways of improvinginculcation of play in instruction. This was evident after accrued results was greater than the criterion value of 3.00 *(M=4.71, SD=.456, n=125).* For example, it was found that to improve ways of improving inculcation of play in instruction Education directors and teachers must provide appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments *(M=4.83, SD=.563, n=125).*

Another way was that Authorities making available play materials forplay activities *(M=4.76, SD=.536, n=125).* The respondents were again of the view that Ministry of Education must organize in-service training for teacherson the inculcation of play in instruction *(M=4.73, SD=.217, n=125).*

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Teachers must model play and introduce children to new play opportunities was not left out as most of the teachers shared that experience *(M=4.69, SD=.323, n=125)*. In related evidence, it was found that teachers must ensure proper time management to ensure play is inculcated ininstruction *(M=4.56, SD=.643, n=125)*.

4.1.4 How teachers can improve the Inculcation of Play in Instruction

When teachers were asked about how they will improve teachers' inculcation of play in instruction in their school, they stated that they should be motivated to use play activities in teaching, provide play materials and provide them with opportunities to have training on the integration of play in instruction.

> *"………. you see madam, as a teacher of this school, it is not my responsibility to provide play materials during lessons. However, because I have been motivated, I will improvise some play materials within my capabilities to help in the children holistic development…." (Respondent A1).*

It was further recounted by one of the teachers that

> *"...for our school, to improve the situation of inoculating of play in instruction, the head teacher and I have started a project of providing a playground. We are using local materials that children can play with and we will supplement it with play materials we intend to buy next academicterm. Play is important in our children's development and we needto improve its usage either in the classroom or outside theclassroom…" (Respondent A6).*

4.2 Discussion of Results

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

4.2.1 Kind of Support Provided for Teachers in the Use of Play inInstruction

With regard to the kind of support provided for teachers to ensure effective inculcation of play in instruction, this study revealed that it is the responsibility of the head teacher to provide play materials,supervision of teachers and pupils, training and education of teachers and motivation of teachers to ensure play environment that support constructive play for pupils.

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

The results from the recent study lend ample study to a number of studies have focused on the role of the teacher in facilitating children's learning through play and that teacher participation in classroom playful activities encourages children's involvement in such activities (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford, 2015; Pugh & Duff 2006; Anning & Edwards, 2006).

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

4.2.2 Play Activities Teachers Engage Pupils during Instruction

Findings from this study showed that teachers integrated games and songs in the classroom learning activities, allowed children to play with toys of their choice despite their gender, engaged children in outdoor play activitiessuch as running, jumping and playing with ball

outside the classroom, and used role plays to strengthen children during play. Teachers also interacted fully with children during play, used nature and science play activities, used television, video and/or computer play activities, used dramatic play during instruction and creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil,cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction in teaching of pre-school pupilsin the Ga West Municipality of Ghana.

The finding of this study is similar to that of Ezenwa (2018) who foundout that physical play can be inculcated in instruction which involves children in developing, practicing and refining bodily movements and control. Bodrovaand Leong (2014) also revealed that children enjoy being creative by dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play-dough and clay, and using their imaginations so teachers must pay attention to these activities to ensure the holistic development of children. The finding of this study agreed with the assertion of Bodrova and Leong (2014).

The finding of this current study corroborates that of Kanokwam and Zoe (2013) who indicated that socio-dramatic play ensures children playing with other children and/or adults and provides opportunities for children to make friends, to negotiate with others, and to develop their communication skills when inculcated in instruction. Studies by Aleke (2011) and Agbo (2017) emphasized role playing technique and stimulation that can be applied by the classroom teacher which involves pupils acting out real situation in a society, in the classroom situation which affirmed the finding of this study.

Though the study found out that teachers in Ga West Municipality of Ghana implored different play activities into teaching, an observationmade in one of the early childhood centres showed that only the children were at the playground without a teacher or supervisor. This finding of the study agreed with those of Tsung-Hui and Wei-Ying (2008) who illustrated that, early childhood teachers set up appropriate, stimulating environment for young children but decide to stand back and may not follow up with supervision, supportive, reactive interactions with

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the children as they play. These authors described this as the early childhood error. Therefore, teachers in the early childhood centres must ensure they are actively involved and monitor all play activities in the school.

The study further lends support to the work of Bondioli (2001) who asserted that, teacher-child interaction during play activities may assist children to foster and exercise their play skills that they have yet to master or developed. Through play interactions, teachers can provide children with developmentally appropriate materials, ideas, practical achievements and support them in the development of their own thoughts and interests (Frost et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978).

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

4.2.3 Barriers to Inculcation of Play in Instruction

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

The finding of this study is consistent with those of Ndani and Kimani (2010) who revealed that teachers are unable to employ pre-scholars in play activities because, play facilities are not available, and early childhood education centres lack leisure facilities, play materials and physical infrastructure. Additionally, the finding of the study agreed with Bafour- Awuah

(2011) who revealed that play period is often too short and is generally under-utilized by teachers in the implementation of curriculum. Bafour- Awuah (2011) further stated that play has been overlooked as a valuable learning resource in classrooms in the majority of pre-school classrooms in Ghana. Past research has well documented elsewhere the challenges of the shift towards more academically focused kindergarten teaching than emphasis on play in instruction (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Jeynes, 2006) and these past research works is in line with the finding of this current study.

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

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

4.2.4 Ways of Improving Inculcation of Play in Instruction

Results on the ways of Improving Inculcation of Play in Instruction show that generally, that there are some ways of improving inculcation of play in instruction. It was found that to

improve ways of inculcation of play in instruction, Education directors and teachers must provide appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments. Another way is authorities making available play materials for play activities. The respondents were again of the view that the Ministry of Education must organize in-service training forteachers on the inculcation of play in instruction.

The results from the study lend support to the work of Miller and Almon (2009) who asserted that there is a direct relationship between academic performance and play when teachers inculcate play in their lessons. My findings and these studies are demonstrable attestation of the direct relationship between play and learning. Similarly, according to the Ministry of Education Science and Sports (2007) inculcation of play provides children the opportunity to discover the world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Also, children`s play promotes and enhances socio-emotional development, cognitive and physical skills that cannot be taught through formal classroom instruction.
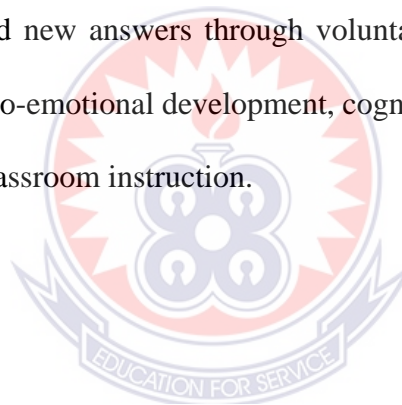
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

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

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

It was found that the head teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana support teachers in the inculcation of play in teaching pre-school pupils by providing play materials, supervision of teachers, training and education of teachers as well as motivation of teachers.

Play activities employed by teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction included integration of games and songs in the classroom learning activities, engaging children in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with balls outside the classroom, use of role plays to strengthen children during play, use of television, video and/or computer play activities, use of dramatic play during instruction and creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil and cut-out ocean animals) activities.

Barriers such as inadequate play materials for children to access during play, learners not provided with adequate time to play, inadequate space for children's play, teachers not motivated to use play, curriculum emphasizing more on non-play teaching methods than use of play in instruction, inadequate in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of play in instruction and misconception of parents about learning through play limited teachers use of play in instruction in early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana .

The results indicated that provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments by Education directors and teachers, teachers modelling play and introducing children to new

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play opportunities, teachers ensuring proper time management to ensure play is inculcated in instruction, authorities making available play materials for play activities and the Ministry of Education organizing in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of play in instruction would ensure effective inculcationof play in instruction.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the results and discussions presented, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Teachers' Engagement in Play Activities: Teachers in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana actively engage pupils in various play activities during instruction. These activities include playing with toys, outdoor activities, creative coloring, dramatic play, and integrating games and songs. This reflects a recognition of play as crucial to holistic child development, aligning with established literature on the benefits of play-based learning for early childhood education.

Support for Teachers in Implementing Play: Teachers receive varying degrees of support for incorporating play into instruction. Key support mechanisms include the provision of play materials, supervision of pupils during play, and training workshops. Motivation from headteachers, through the provision of resources and encouragement, also plays a significant role. However, challenges remain, particularly concerning the consistent availability of play materials and adequate training.

Barriers to Play Implementation: Several barriers hinder the full integration of play in instruction, including insufficient play materials, limited space for play activities, misconceptions by parents regarding learning through play, inadequate teacher training, and a curriculum that places more emphasis on non-play teaching methods. These barriers significantly restrict the potential benefits of play in early childhood education.

Recommendations for Improvement: Teachers and respondents suggested several strategies to overcome these challenges. These include providing appropriate indoor and outdoor play environments, increasing access to play materials, and organizing in-service training for

teachers. Furthermore, ensuring sufficient time for play and linking play activities to the curriculum would enhance the effectiveness of play-based learning.

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

Some challenges teachers face in their quest to implement their ideasin the inculcation of play are inadequate play materials for children to access during play, learners not provided with adequate time to play, inadequate space for children's play, teachers not motivated to use play, standard based curriculum (2020) emphasizing more on play based pedagogies than the method assessment which does not support play in instruction. Also, inadequate in-service training for teachers which affects them in the inculcation ofplay in instruction

It can be established that some measures can be put in place to revamp, rejuvenate and help implement teachers' skills and competencies. Some of the key measures could be provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor play materials, safe environments provided by education directors and teachers, teachers modelling play and introducing children to new play opportunities, teachers ensuring proper time management to ensure play is inculcated in instruction, authorities making available play materials for play activities and Ministry of Education organizing in-service training for teachers.

In summary, while play is recognized and incorporated into early childhood instruction in Ga West, challenges remain regarding resources and training. Addressing these issues could improve the quality and outcomes of early childhood education through enhanced play-based learning.

5.4 Recommendations

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

1. Provision of Adequate Play Materials: The Ministry of Education (MoE) and school authorities should prioritize supplying appropriate play materials, including toys, art supplies, and sports equipment. Regular updates and replacements should be made to ensure children have access to quality resources that promote learning through play.

2. Creating Safe Play Environments: Schools need to develop safe indoor and outdoor spaces dedicated to play. Local education authorities can work with schools to ensure that playgrounds are well-maintained and conducive to various types of play activities, including physical, creative, and cognitive play.

3. Comprehensive In-Service Training: The MoE should organize frequent in-service training sessions that focus on modern play-based learning techniques. These workshops should cover strategies for integrating play into the curriculum and address the importance of play in holistic child development, equipping teachers with the necessary skills to engage children effectively.

4. Parental Education Programs: Educating parents about the value of play in early childhood development can help change misconceptions. Workshops or information sessions can help parents understand that play is not only enjoyable but also critical for cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

5. Curriculum Revisions to Support Play: The curriculum should be reviewed to align more closely with play-based learning principles. Authorities should ensure that play is not sidelined in favour of more academic-focused instruction. Incorporating assessments that evaluate learning through play could encourage its broader adoption.

6. Motivation and Support for Teachers: Teachers should be encouraged and supported by school leadership to implement play-based methods. This can include providing

incentives, recognizing innovative play-based teaching practices, and ensuring a supportive atmosphere that motivates teachers to make play a central part of their pedagogy.

7. Time Management for Play in the School Schedule: Teachers and school administrators should ensure that sufficient time is allocated for play during the school day. This could involve structured play periods that are integrated with the academic curriculum to create a balance between play and formal learning.

8. Modelling Play in the Classroom: Teachers should take an active role in modelling play for children, introducing new games, activities, and role-play opportunities that engage students' imagination and creativity. This hands-on approach helps foster a learning environment that is dynamic and interactive.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

1. This study can be expanded using a larger sample by including more preschools and teachers to share their experiences. The scope of this study can also be meaningfully extended to embrace perspectives of administrators and parents as their perspectives may serve to complement the perspectives of early childhood teachers in addressing potential gaps and challenges to be addressed by educational policy makers.

2. This study has opened a small window to the area of the study, which is listening to the voices of Ga West Municipality preschool teachers. Further research is needed to understand more fully the beliefs of different groups of early childhood practitioners. From a wider perspective, in-depth research studies on differing aspects of play and best practices on how teachers can effectively extend learning through classroom pedagogies should be identified and commissioned by both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), in order to build up a pool of research-based evidence in support of early childhood best practices grounded in the Ghanaian context and

experience. Findings from these studies can then be used to fine-tune existing early childhood education policy frameworks and/or formulate new tenets to suit future circumstances and early childhood educational landscape development.

3. More importantly, further research needs to be undertaken on developmentally appropriate practices and eclectic approaches at preschool levels with the view of harvesting the positive attributes from these approaches. Also, with the high level of prioritisation in education, it is timely to deploy resources to undertake longitudinalstudies in an effort to ascertain the long-term benefits of engaging our children in early childhood education.

4. Further studies must be conducted to assess the impact of play on the holistic development of children.

5. Additionally, the study findings were limited to early childhood centres in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. Therefore, this study should be conducted in different districts across the country with larger sample size.

5.6 Limitations

It is important to recognize that my position as a teacher in the early childhood education institution may affect the data collected on the perspectives and practices of the teacher-participants. Teacher-participants might engage in "Showcase" pedagogies rather than doing what they normally practiced in their classrooms. However, irrespective of my background, I maintained as a professional in the study to eliminate any conflict of interest.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

I am PRISCILLA ADJELEY ADDO, a graduate of Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba. This interview guide is been used to conduct research on the role of early childhood teachers and teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. Information received would be used for academic purpose and would be treated with confidentiality. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. It will take 30 to 50 minutes of your time to end this interview session. Participation in this study is voluntary.

1. Do you allow teachers to engage learners in play activities?

2. How often do you organize workshops for teachers?

3. Do you provide enough outdoor and play equipment and materials?

   If yes, what equipment and material have you provided?

4. How do you supervise play activities?

5. What other roles do you play to ensure teachers inculate play in instruction?

6. How do you provide opportunities for teaching through play?

7. What strategies have you put in place to sustain play in your pre school?

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

I am PRISCILLA ADJELEY ADDO, a graduate of Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba. This interview guide is been used to conduct research on the role of early childhood teachers and teachers in the inculcation of play in instruction in the Ga West Municipality of Ghana. Information received would be used for academic purpose and would be treated with confidentiality. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. It will

take 30 to 50 minutes of your time to end this interview session. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Section A: Play activities teachers engage pupils during instruction

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

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

11. Others(specify):

……………………………………………………………………………………

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Section B: Barriers to the instruction of play in instruction.

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

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

21. Others(specify):

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Section C: Views of teachers on improving the inculcation of play in instruction

INSTRUCTION: Please indicate in the table the how the inculcation of play in instruction could be improved. Please read the statements carefully and tick [√] the answer from the corresponding box that best describes your choice of response.

Ways of improving the inculcation of play in instruction	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
22. Education directors and teachers must provide appropriate indoor and outdoor play safe environments					
23. Teachers must model play and introduce learners to new play opportunities					
24. Teachers must ensure proper time management t ensure play is inculcated in instruction					
25. Authorites making available play materials for play activities					
26. Ministry of Education must organize in service training for teacher on the inculcation of play in instruction					

27. Others(specify):

………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………

APPENDIX B

RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS OF THE INSTRUMENT
OVERALL RELIABILITY
Case Processing Summary

	N	%
Valid	30	100.0
Excluded[a]	0	.0
Total	30	100.0

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.672	27
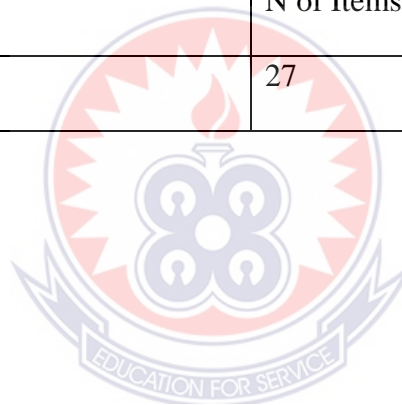
APPENDIX C

RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS OF THE INSTRUMENT

SECTION A (PLAY ACTIVITIES)

Case Processing Summary

	N	%
Valid	30	100.0
Excluded[a]	0	.0
Total	30	100.0

a. List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure

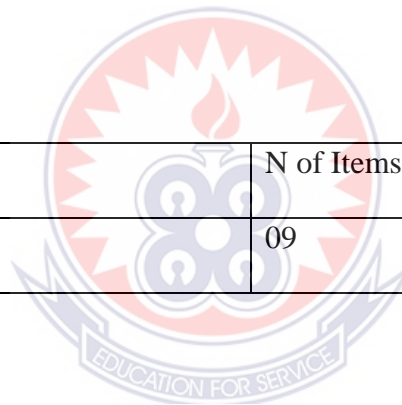Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.723	11
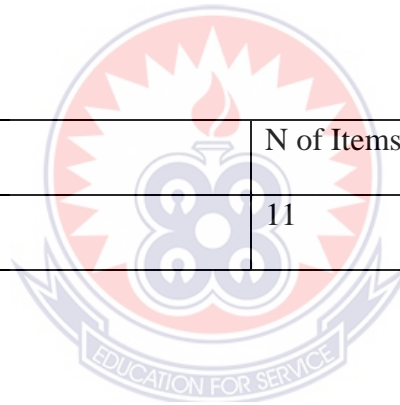
APPENDIX D

RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS OF THE INSTRUMENT

SECTION B (BARRIERS)

Case processing summary

	N	%
Valid	30	100.0
Excluded[a]	0	.0
Total	30	100.0

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.701	09

APPENDIX E

RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS OF THE INSTRUMENT

SECTION C (WAYS TO IMPROVE THE USE OF PLAY)

Case processing summary

	N	%
Valid	30	100.0
Excluded[a]	0	.0
Total	30	100.0

a. List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.625	09

125