UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY IN THE KUMBUNGU DISTRICT

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

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

Candidate's Signature: …….

Date: ……..

Supervisor's Declaration

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

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Awini Adam

Supervisor's Signature: …….

Date: ……

DEDICATION

To my lovely Family

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District. The study adopted a positivist paradigm, employed a quantitative approach, and used a descriptive research design. A sample size of 127 teachers was selected using the Krech and Morgan sample table. Data were collected using a questionnaire, which was designed to gather information on teachers' beliefs, training, understanding of play-based pedagogy, and the challenges they face in its implementation. The questionnaire included closed-ended items on a Likert scale, allowing for quantifiable analysis of teachers' perspectives and practices. The study found that early childhood teachers' use of play-based teaching depends largely on their beliefs, prior training, and understanding of the educational value of play. Despite positive attitudes towards play-based methods, many teachers reported challenges such as lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and time constraints. The study concluded that effective implementation of play-based pedagogy requires adequate resources, comprehensive teacher training, and supportive school leadership. It recommended regular in-service training, provision of teaching materials, reduction of classroom sizes, and ongoing mentorship for teachers. These measures aim to equip teachers with the skills, confidence, and environment necessary to make play a meaningful and integral part of early childhood education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Early childhood education has gained worldwide attention as a critical foundation for children's learning and development. Experts agree that the early years of life are incredibly important for shaping how children think, socialize, and manage their emotions. One teaching approach that really supports these areas of growth is play-based learning. This method encourages children to learn through play, giving them the freedom to explore, create, and make sense of new ideas in a natural, enjoyable way (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO strongly support play-based learning. According to UNICEF (2018), learning through play helps children develop important skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. UNESCO also promotes child-centered learning, highlighting play as a way to help children grow in all areas, cognitive, social, and emotional.

Research has shown that play-based learning positively influences children's thinking abilities, social interactions, and emotional well-being. For example, Ginsburg (2007) found that children who engage in both guided and free play tend to develop better problem-solving skills, control over their emotions, and social skills. Similarly, Pyle and Bigelow (2015) explain that play makes learning new concepts fun and interesting, which helps children remember what they have learned better. Because of these benefits, countries like Finland, Canada, and Australia have made play-based learning a key part of their early childhood education programs.

Despite these advantages, many African countries still struggle to fully adopt play-based learning. Challenges such as lack of materials, overcrowded classrooms, and limited teacher training often

make it hard for teachers to use this method effectively (Lillard et al., 2013). Nevertheless, efforts are underway in many places to introduce and expand play-based teaching. For instance, South Africa has included play-based learning in its national curriculum to help improve literacy and numeracy among young children (Maringe & Prew, 2015). A study by Marfo and Biersteker (2011) in Ghana and South Africa highlighted the importance of providing teachers with proper training to successfully use play-based approaches. These developments suggest that play is slowly gaining recognition as a valuable way to teach young children across Africa.

In Ghana, significant steps have been taken to improve early childhood education. The government has introduced policies aimed at raising the quality of learning in kindergartens. Two important policies are the 2007 Education Reform and the 2019 National Kindergarten Curriculum, both of which emphasize the role of play in helping children learn through engaging and interactive activities.

The 2019 National Kindergarten Curriculum Framework encourages teachers to use play-based methods to support children's overall development including their thinking, social, physical, and emotional growth (Ministry of Education, 2019). The curriculum points out that play promotes creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that are essential for success later in life. However, despite these positive policies, research shows that Ghana still faces challenges in fully implementing play-based learning. These include inadequate resources and insufficient opportunities for teachers to receive ongoing training (Amoako & Boakye, 2020).

In line with national goals, schools in the municipality have adopted the 2019 Kindergarten Curriculum, which supports play-based teaching. Yet, there is little research on how well this approach is being put into practice in the Kumbungu District. Specifically, there is limited

information about teachers' knowledge of play-based learning, the kinds of play activities they use, and the challenges they encounter.

One key factor for successfully using play-based teaching is how much teachers know about it. In Kumbungu District, it is important to find out whether early childhood educators understand the principles of play-based learning and recognize its benefits for child development. According to Pianta et al. (2009), teachers who are well-informed about play-based methods are better able to create classrooms where children are actively engaged and learning effectively.

A study by Adu-Gyamfi and Adjei (2019), who are university lecturers in early childhood education, explored how teachers in public preschools in Kumbungu understand and use play-based learning. They conducted interviews and classroom observations over three months in 10 public basic schools. Their findings showed that while many teachers had heard of play-based learning, their knowledge and practice were inconsistent. This was mainly due to limited professional development and few chances for in-service training. Often, teachers saw play mostly as a break or fun activity rather than a structured way to teach, highlighting a gap between theory and real classroom practice (Adu-Gyamfi & Adjei, 2019).

Play activities can take many forms, such as imaginative play, building with blocks, physical games, and language-based activities. The types of play teachers choose usually depend on what resources are available, the age group, and the learning goals. It's important to understand what kinds of play activities teachers in Kumbungu District are using. Are they mainly offering free play, where children explore on their own, or are they using more structured play aimed at specific skills?

Research by Bodrova and Leong (2007) suggests that both structured and unstructured play are important. Structured play helps children learn specific skills, like counting or letter recognition,

while free play encourages creativity and problem-solving. Knowing which activities teachers use can give us a clearer picture of how learning through play is happening in Kumbungu.

Despite its benefits, teachers in Kumbungu face several challenges when trying to use play-based learning. These include lack of toys, games, and outdoor spaces needed for effective play. Large class sizes and strict curriculum requirements also make it hard to spend enough time on play-based activities (Amoako & Boakye, 2020). Cultural attitudes that see play as separate from real learning can also be a barrier. In some communities, there is pressure for classroom time to focus on memorizing facts rather than on playing (Tobin, 2011). To improve play-based learning, it's important to understand these barriers and provide teachers with the support they need to overcome them.

Worldwide, the move toward play-based teaching shows how important it is for children's overall development. In Ghana, the 2019 Kindergarten Curriculum is a positive step toward making play a regular part of early education. However, the success of this approach in places like Kumbungu depends on how well teachers understand it, what play activities they use, and how they manage challenges. This study aims to look closely at these factors to help improve early childhood education in the district.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Play-based teaching, which involves using play as a way for children to learn, has become an important part of early childhood education. This approach is based on the idea that children learn best when they are actively involved in fun and meaningful activities that help their thinking, emotions, social skills, and physical growth develop (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In Ghana, the education system has embraced this idea, especially with the introduction of the 2019 Kindergarten Curriculum, which encourages learning through play. However, even though play-based teaching

is highlighted in the curriculum, many early childhood teachers, especially in rural places like Kumbungu District, face difficulties in understanding and putting these methods into practice.

Early childhood education in Ghana is seen as the foundation for children's future success in school. The government has made efforts to improve the quality of kindergarten education by introducing reforms (Ministry of Education, 2019). Still, research shows that while the curriculum promotes play as a learning tool, many teachers do not have enough knowledge or training to carry it out well (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). This gap raises concerns about whether children in areas with fewer resources, like Kumbungu District, are really benefiting from play-based learning. Many teachers struggle because they lack proper training, materials, and support, which affects how well children learn through play.

Studies also show that for play-based learning to work well, teachers need to know how to plan, guide, and evaluate play activities that help children learn (Skene et al., 2022). What teachers believe about the importance of play also influences how they teach (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2022). So, it is important to understand how much teachers in Kumbungu District know about play-based learning and what they think about it. This can help reveal where they might need more training or support.

Play activities in the classroom can be either planned, like puzzles and role-playing, or spontaneous, where children explore on their own. The kinds of play teachers use often depend on their training, the materials they have, and the culture of the community (Fleer & Pramling Samuelsson, 2021). Looking at the types of play activities teachers use in Kumbungu District can give a clearer picture of how play-based learning is happening in real classrooms and how it matches up with what the curriculum expects. It can also show if these activities meet the needs of the children's development.

Despite the benefits of learning through play, many teachers face challenges when trying to use this approach. These challenges can come from a lack of materials, large class sizes, not enough training opportunities, and little support from school leaders (Hedges & Cullen, 2019). In rural areas like Kumbungu, these problems may be even bigger because of the community's economic situation. These difficulties make it harder for teachers to use play-based teaching effectively. By identifying how many teachers face these problems, this study hopes to highlight the barriers that need to be removed to improve play-based learning in early childhood education.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District

1.4 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives;

1. To examine the factors that influence teachers in Kumbungu District to adopt or reject play-based teaching methods.
2. To identify the challenges teachers face when implementing play-based teaching in the Kumbungu District.
3. To explore the types of support teachers require to effectively implement play-based teaching methods in the Kumbungu District.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions guided the study;

1. What factors influence early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District to adopt or reject play-based teaching methods?

2. What challenges do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District face when implementing play-based teaching?
3. What forms of support do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District need to implement play-based teaching effectively?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, particularly those involved in shaping early childhood education in Ghana. By highlighting the level of knowledge educators possess about play-based pedagogy and identifying the challenges they face in its implementation, the study will offer data-driven recommendations for policymakers to address gaps in training, resources, and infrastructure. It will also contribute to the ongoing discussions regarding the effective rollout of the 2019 Kindergarten Curriculum, which emphasizes play-based learning. Insights from this study may encourage policymakers to design more tailored interventions that consider the unique needs of rural District like Kumbungu, ensuring that educators across different contexts are equally equipped to adopt play-based teaching.

At the practical level, this study is significant for early childhood educators, school administrators, and curriculum developers. By determining the types of play-based activities currently being used in early childhood classrooms, the research will identify best practices that can be adopted or improved upon. Additionally, understanding the percentage of educators who face challenges with play-based pedagogy will allow education stakeholders to create more targeted professional development programs, which can strengthen educators' pedagogical skills and boost their confidence in implementing play-based learning. The findings can also inform the creation of support systems, such as mentorship programs or resource-sharing networks, to help educators overcome the identified challenges.

Theoretically, this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on early childhood education, particularly in the context of developing countries like Ghana. It will explore the intersection of play-based pedagogy with local teaching practices, cultural contexts, and resource constraints, providing a more nuanced understanding of how play-based learning is conceptualized and practiced in rural settings. This research will expand on existing theories of play-based learning, which emphasize its role in promoting holistic child development, by integrating findings from a context that has been underrepresented in the literature. Additionally, it will add to discussions on the relationship between educator knowledge and pedagogical effectiveness, potentially leading to new frameworks for understanding how play-based learning can be successfully implemented in diverse educational environments.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The study was geographically delimited to the Kumbungu District, a rural area in Ghana's Eastern Region. The study was delimited to the exploration of play-based pedagogy in early childhood education, focusing specifically on the level of knowledge early childhood educators have about play-based pedagogy, the types of play-based activities educators implement in their classrooms, and the challenges educators face in using play-based teaching methods. In context, the study was delimited to early childhood education, particularly kindergarten settings within the Kumbungu District. The study employed a descriptive survey using quantitative methods.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Play-Based Pedagogy -Play-based pedagogy refers to a teaching approach used in early childhood education where educators facilitate learning experiences through structured or unstructured play activities.

Early Childhood Educators- Early childhood educators are teachers or facilitators who work with children in kindergarten settings, typically aged 4 to 6 years, in formal education institutions within the Kumbungu District.

Play-Based Activities- Play-based activities refer to specific types of educational tasks or games that are utilized by educators to promote learning through play.

Challenges in Implementation- Challenges in implementation refer to the difficulties or barriers that early childhood educator's encounter when attempting to incorporate play-based pedagogy into their teaching.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study was structured into five thematic chapters. Chapter one presented the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, delimitations, limitations of the study, and the operational definition of terms. Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the main concepts and issues addressed in the study. Chapter Three vividly outlined the research methodology that guided the study. The methodology focused on research design, population, sampling procedure, research instruments, reliability and validity of instruments, pre-testing of the instruments, ethical considerations, data collection procedure, and data processing and analysis. Chapter Four included the presentation of results, analysis, and discussions of the findings of the study based on the research questions. Chapter Five captured the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research or studies. The study ends with the references and the appendices of evidence.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

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

Theoretical Framework

1. Concept of Play
2. Types of Play
3. Play in Early Childhood Education
4. Benefits of Play in Early Childhood Education
5. factors influence teachers play based teaching
6. Challenges in Implementing Play-Based Pedagogy
7. Support Systems for Effective Implementation
8. Summary of Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

Experiential Learning Theory (John Dewey)

John Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory serves as a foundational element in education, emphasizing the essential role of experience in the learning process. Dewey first articulated his views in works such as "Experience and Education" (1938), advocating for education to be rooted in real-world experiences and active involvement rather than rote memorization or passive absorption of information.

Core Principles of Experiential Learning

Learning through Experience

At the core of Dewey's theory is the belief that education should arise from real-world experiences. Dewey (1938) asserted that "all genuine education comes about through experience" (p. 13). This principle suggests that knowledge is constructed through direct engagement with the environment, rather than passively receiving information. Experiences that hold significance and relevance to the learner's life form the basis for acquiring new knowledge.

Reflective Thinking

Dewey highlighted the crucial role of reflective thinking within experiential learning. Reflection enables learners to process their experiences, analyze outcomes, and derive conclusions that inform their future actions. He defined reflective thinking as "an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). This practice fosters critical thinking skills and promotes a deeper comprehension of the subject matter.

Continuity and Interaction

Dewey introduced the concepts of continuity and interaction to elucidate how experiences shape learning. Continuity implies that each experience builds on prior ones, influencing the learner's continuous development. Interaction refers to the dynamic relationship between the learner and their environment, underscoring how experiences are shaped by context and individual perception (Dewey, 1938). Together, these principles highlight the evolving nature of knowledge and the significance of context in the learning process.

Active Participation

Experiential learning emphasizes the necessity of active participation and engagement in the learning process. Dewey believed that learners should take an active role in their education, engaging with materials, concepts, and peers to construct meaning. This principle stands in contrast to traditional educational models that prioritize passive reception of information. By actively participating in learning activities, learners become co-creators of knowledge, gaining ownership of their educational journey.

Social Interaction

Dewey recognized the inherently social nature of learning, highlighting the importance of interaction and collaboration in education. He contended that learning is a communal process where individuals share experiences and ideas, contributing to collective knowledge (Dewey, 1938). This principle underscores the value of cooperative learning environments that encourage communication, negotiation, and joint problem-solving.

John Dewey's core principles of experiential learning underscore the active, reflective, and social dimensions of the learning process. By grounding education in meaningful experiences and promoting active participation, Dewey's theory advocates for a dynamic and engaging approach to learning that empowers learners to construct knowledge through direct interaction with their environment.

Critiques of Experiential Theory

While John Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory has significantly influenced education, it faces several critiques and challenges:

Lack of Structure and Guidance

A major critique of experiential learning is its potential lack of structure and guidance, which can lead to variability in educational outcomes. Critics argue that not all experiences are inherently

educational; without clear objectives, learners may not derive meaningful insights from their activities (Kolb, 2014). This can result in superficial understanding rather than deep learning. Some educators express concern that experiential learning can be overly open-ended, leaving learners without the necessary scaffolding to grasp complex concepts fully.

Assessment Difficulties

Assessing learning outcomes in experiential education presents challenges. Traditional assessment methods, like standardized tests, may not effectively capture the skills and knowledge gained through experiential learning. The subjective nature of experiences and reflections can complicate the establishment of clear and consistent evaluation criteria (Symon, 2018). This poses a challenge for educators needing to demonstrate student progress within standard educational systems.

Resource Intensiveness

Implementing experiential learning approaches often demands significant resources, including time, materials, and trained personnel. Designing and facilitating meaningful experiential activities can be resource-intensive, posing challenges for institutions with limited budgets (Truong et al., 2016). Additionally, experiential learning may require smaller class sizes and more individualized attention, further increasing resource demands.

Contextual Limitations

Experiential learning emphasizes the importance of context and real-world application. However, not all educational content easily adapts to experiential methods. Some subjects or skills may require more direct instruction or theoretical understanding before effective practical application (Ashman, 2020). This can limit the applicability of experiential learning in certain disciplines or educational levels.

Variability in Learner Experience

The personal nature of experiential learning means that learners may have varied experiences and interpretations, leading to different learning outcomes. While diversity in experience can enrich learning, it can also create challenges in ensuring that all students achieve the same core competencies or understanding of the material (Fink, 2013). This variability can complicate the design and delivery of experiential learning programs.

John Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory significantly shapes play-based learning approaches in kindergarten centers. The theory emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, aligning closely with play-based learning principles, allowing children to engage actively with their environment and fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The Role of Experiential Learning in Play-Based Learning

Learning through Experience

Dewey's theory posits that education should be rooted in real-world experiences and active participation (Dewey, 1938). In kindergarten centers, play-based learning embodies this principle by offering children hands-on, interactive activities that encourage exploration and discovery. Through play, children can experiment, solve problems, and develop new skills in a natural, engaging manner, helping them understand their surroundings and build foundational knowledge.

Development of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Experiential learning fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential in play-based learning. Dewey argued that learning should involve inquiry and reflection, allowing learners to construct knowledge through experience (Dewey, 1938). In play-based environments, children engage in activities that require them to think critically, make decisions, and solve problems. For

instance, building a tower with blocks or participating in role-playing allows children to test hypotheses, analyze outcomes, and learn from their experiences.

Social Interaction and Collaboration

Dewey viewed education as a social process, where learners benefit from collaboration and communication (Dewey, 1938). Play-based learning environments encourage social interaction and collaboration among children. Through group play activities, children learn to communicate, share ideas, negotiate roles, and work toward common goals. These interactions promote social-emotional development and help children cultivate important interpersonal skills, including empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Fostering Creativity and Imagination

Play-based learning nurtures children's creativity and imagination, core components of experiential learning. Dewey advocated for educational experiences that encourage creative thinking and innovation (Dewey, 1938). In kindergarten centers, play-based activities allow children to explore their interests and express themselves freely. Creative play, such as drawing, storytelling, or imaginative scenarios, enables children to experiment with ideas and develop their creative potential.

Holistic Development

Dewey's theory emphasizes the holistic nature of learning, asserting that education should encompass the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of the learner (Dewey, 1938). Play-based learning aligns with this holistic approach by providing varied activities that engage children across multiple developmental domains. For instance, physical play promotes motor skills, cognitive play enhances problem-solving abilities, and social play fosters emotional regulation and interpersonal skills, contributing to the overall growth and development of the child.

John Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory serves as a foundational framework for understanding the value of play-based learning in kindergarten centers. By emphasizing learning through experience, social interaction, and holistic development, Dewey's theory supports the creation of engaging and meaningful learning environments for young children. Play-based learning not only enhances cognitive and social skills but also nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of learning, aligning with Dewey's vision of education as an interactive and dynamic process.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

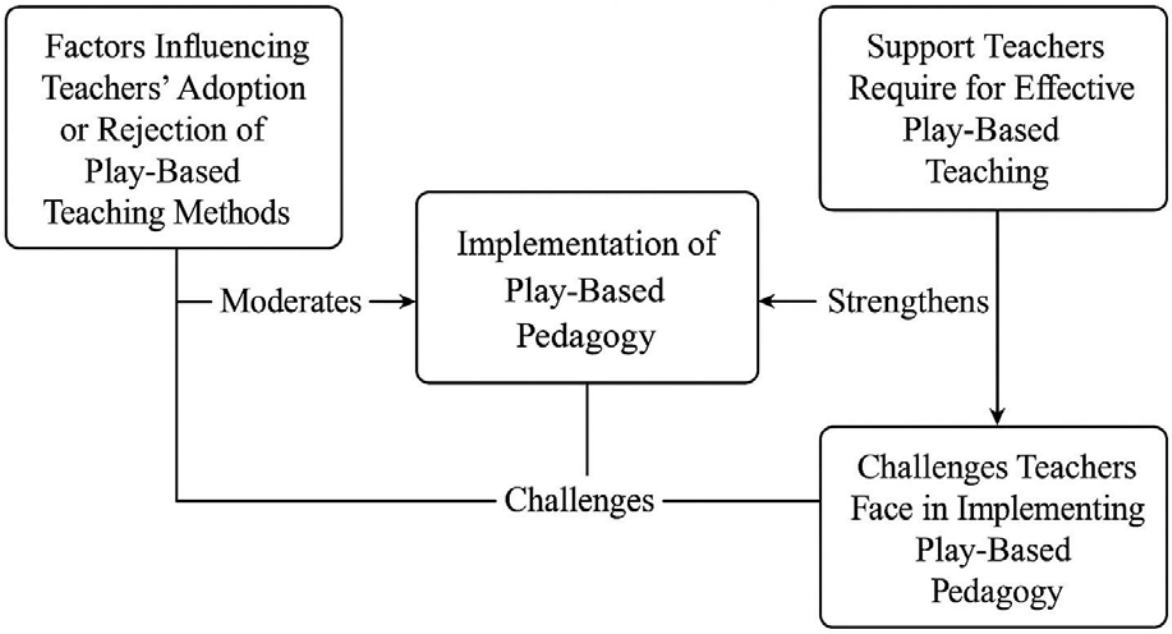

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for Literacy Skills Development

The conceptual framework presented in the diagram illustrates the relationships among the major variables that shape early childhood teachers' perspectives on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District. The framework is grounded in established theories of early childhood learning and teacher practice, particularly the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky, which emphasises learning through interaction and hands-on activities (Vygotsky, 1978), and contemporary early childhood pedagogy models that promote play as a central method for learning. The diagram positions the implementation of play-based pedagogy as the central construct, acknowledging that the success or failure of this instructional approach depends on three interconnected sets of variables: factors influencing teachers' adoption or rejection, challenges teachers face, and supports teachers require. This explanation discusses each component in depth, outlines how they interact, and shows why they are critical for understanding teacher perspectives within the context of Kumbungu District.

The central box in the diagram, "Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy," represents the core phenomenon under investigation. Play-based pedagogy refers to instructional practices in which play is deliberately used as a medium for learning, problem-solving, creativity, and socio-emotional development (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In early childhood education, play is recognised globally as an essential tool that allows children to explore, manipulate materials, and engage meaningfully with peers and adults (UNICEF, 2020). The successful implementation of play-based pedagogy depends heavily on teachers, because they decide when, how, and why play activities are integrated into classroom routines. Teachers not only guide these experiences but also create an enabling environment for playful learning to happen. Therefore, understanding teachers' perspectives is essential for assessing the extent to which play-based methods are effectively utilised in the Kumbungu District. Teachers' beliefs, motivations, and attitudes directly influence how they design lessons, organise learning spaces, and interact with children during play (Lynch, 2019).

For this reason, the implementation box sits at the centre of the framework, symbolising its position as the dependent variable shaped by multiple external forces.

The first major variable influencing implementation is labelled "Factors Influencing Teachers' Adoption or Rejection of Play-Based Teaching Methods." This construct represents the internal and external motivators that shape whether teachers choose to adopt or reject play-based instruction. Research indicates that teachers' beliefs about play, their training background, perceived benefits, personal philosophies of teaching, and previous experiences with play-based methods are strong predictors of whether they implement such approaches (Pyle & Alaca, 2018). These factors may also include teacher attitudes, readiness, confidence, motivation level, and perceptions about children's learning needs. Teachers who view play as academically valuable are more likely to adopt play-based teaching, while those who associate learning only with formal, teacher-directed activities may reject it (Walsh et al., 2010). Within the Kumbungu District, these factors may be shaped by the cultural context, institutional expectations, curriculum demands, or teachers' exposure to contemporary forms of pedagogy during their training.

In the diagram, an arrow extends from this box to the central implementation box and is labelled "Moderates." This arrow indicates that the factors influencing adoption act as a moderating variable, meaning they either enhance or reduce the likelihood that teachers will apply play-based methods. If teachers hold favourable views about play, the moderating influence will be positive, strengthening the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Conversely, if teachers believe that play reduces instructional time, leads to classroom disorder, or fails to promote academic readiness, the moderating effect becomes negative, resulting in rejection or inconsistent application of play-based techniques. This moderating relationship demonstrates that teacher adoption is not a direct cause of implementation but rather shapes the strength and direction of how implementation occurs. For instance, two teachers may work in similar environments but implement play differently depending on their internal motivation and professional beliefs (Lynch, 2015). In this way, the conceptual framework recognises the psychological and experiential dimensions that influence instructional decision-making.

The second major component in the framework is "Challenges Teachers Face in Implementing Play-Based Pedagogy." This box represents the obstacles and constraints that hinder the effective use of play-based teaching in classrooms. Studies conducted in low-resource educational contexts show that teachers often struggle with large class sizes, limited teaching materials, insufficient space for physical play, pressure to complete academic syllabi, and misconceptions among parents who equate learning only with formal instruction (Ng'aambi & Makewa, 2019). In the Kumbungu District, such challenges are particularly relevant, given that many schools operate with overcrowded classrooms, limited outdoor play facilities, and inadequate furniture. Additionally, teachers often lack professional guidance on how to scaffold children's learning through play, which can reduce their confidence in this method.

In the diagram, the arrow linking this box to the central implementation box is labelled "Challenges." This label demonstrates a direct negative influence in which the existence of challenges weakens the implementation of play-based teaching. The more barriers teachers encounter, the less likely they are to incorporate structured play into their lessons. The framework thereby acknowledges that even if teachers hold positive beliefs about play-based pedagogy, environmental and structural barriers can still prevent successful implementation. This reflects findings in literature that suggest teacher attitudes alone are insufficient; enabling conditions must also be present (OECD, 2021). For example, a teacher who values play may still avoid using it if her class has 70 children or if she lacks materials such as blocks, puzzles, or art supplies. The framework therefore integrates the practical realities teachers encounter, highlighting the importance of addressing contextual challenges in order to promote effective implementation.

The third major variable in the framework is "Support Teachers Require for Effective Play-Based Teaching." This construct refers to the types of institutional and professional assistance that can enable teachers to implement play-based pedagogy successfully. Support may include professional development programs, instructional coaching, mentoring, provision of teaching and learning materials, administrative support, parental cooperation, and curriculum guidance. Research confirms that teachers are more likely to use play-based teaching when they receive continuous support, encouragement, and clear guidelines from

school leaders, education officers, and policymakers (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). Professional development is especially influential because it equips teachers with strategies for managing play, designing play-rich environments, and linking play activities to learning outcomes (Akman et al., 2020). Furthermore, support from headteachers such as providing time, resources, and monitoring creates a school culture where play-based learning is valued and encouraged.

In the diagram, the arrow from this box to the challenges box is labelled "Strengthens," indicating that adequate support enhances teachers' ability to overcome challenges. The arrow then flows from the challenges box to the central implementation box, symbolising that support indirectly improves implementation by reducing the effects of challenges. This relationship portrays support as a buffering variable: it reduces the negative impact of constraints, thereby facilitating the implementation of play-based pedagogy. For example, teachers who lack space may receive mobile play kits, teachers with heavy workloads may receive co-teaching support, and teachers who feel unprepared may receive targeted training. These forms of support strengthen teachers' practice by equipping them with resources, skills, and confidence.

The structure of the diagram communicates that these three variables factors influencing adoption, challenges faced, and support required do not operate independently. Instead, they interact dynamically to shape teachers' perspectives and practices. Teachers' willingness to adopt play-based teaching may be high, but without adequate support, implementation remains weak. Similarly, teachers may be trained and motivated but still struggle if environmental challenges persist. The diagram therefore positions the implementation of play-based pedagogy as a phenomenon that results from the combined effects of personal, institutional, and contextual factors. This systems-oriented view aligns with frameworks in early childhood education that emphasise the interplay between teacher beliefs, school conditions, and policy environments (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The conceptual framework thus provides a holistic lens for analysing teacher perspectives in the Kumbungu District.

Furthermore, the diagram aligns with the study objectives. The first objective examining factors that influence teachers to adopt or reject play-based methods is represented through the moderating role of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and motivations. The second objective identifying challenges teachers face is directly reflected in the challenges box and its negative influence on implementation. The third objective exploring the types of support teachers require is captured through the support box and its strengthening effect. Together, these variables create a logical structure for understanding how each objective contributes to the broader aim of exploring teachers' perspectives.

2.3 Concept of Play

The understanding of children's play has historically been viewed as a fundamental element in developing educational pedagogy (Papatheodorou & Potts, 2021). Over the years, extensive research has led to various definitions of play, with numerous theorists and researchers offering different interpretations. While their definitions vary, many overlap in their perspectives on play, which can be understood and conceptualized through a multitude of theoretical and ideological lenses.

Boakye (2021) describes play as "an activity that is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed, and episodic." As a pleasurable activity, play is seen as a context in which children engage with their environment and learn about the world around them (Moyles, 2014). Gordon (2009) further explains that "play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected and making transformation possible" (p. 8). Through play, children learn informally and connect their experiences to real life. Their voluntary

movements including exploration, play, and learning according to their interests allow them to satisfy their curiosity and grow developmentally.

Moyles (2014) highlights that characteristics of play include intrinsic motivation, engagement, reliance on internal rather than external rules, control and autonomy, and a focus on means rather than ends. Children create their own rules to align with their play situations, experiencing joy and skill development through self-motivation. According to Nilsson et al. (2018), play is perceived as an activity initiated by children, while learning results from adult-led practices to aid their understanding. They argue that both play activities and learning situations are joyful experiences, as play and learning are intertwined in early childhood settings, serving as vital processes for promoting children's learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2024). Play offers children the chance to explore the world and discover new answers through voluntary learning. It also enhances socio-emotional development and cognitive and physical skills that cannot be taught through formal instruction (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007).

Play enables children to engage in relevant activities actively, emphasizing enjoyment rather than a specific goal (Besio, 2017). An essential aspect of play in early years settings is the incorporation of play into the teaching process. For practitioners, fostering a greater confidence to tackle challenges and embrace risks in search of new ideas is crucial for supporting children's development. Play is often recognized as a cognitively challenging process, requiring children to utilize their abilities, memory, symbols, and cultural tools. This includes developing language and social skills, such as negotiation, communication, planning, sharing, and prediction (Wolfberg, 2015). Many skills necessary for later life are cultivated through play, making it significant in preschool settings. Children will continually engage in various learning experiences, which will aid their future learning. Overall, play is regarded as an important and developmentally appropriate

learning activity valuable for all children (Irvin, 2017). However, despite its importance, Hyvonen (2011) notes that play's application in schools and early years settings can encounter restrictions. The discourse surrounding play, both theoretically and practically, is essential to understanding its role in early childhood education.

2.3.1 Types of Play

Given the challenges in defining play and acknowledging its complexity, numerous attempts have been made to categorize its different types. As Moyles (2014) illustrates, each aspect of children's development corresponds to a specific form of play. In contemporary psychological literature, play is generally classified into five main types based on their developmental purposes, partly stemming from evolutionary analyses and their connections to children's learning. These categories are typically identified as physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretense/socio-dramatic play, and games with rules (Power, 2000). Although each type of play serves a primary developmental function, all contribute to physical, intellectual, social-emotional, and creative growth. Evidence suggests that a balanced experience of each play type is likely beneficial for children's overall development.

Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood that significantly influences development across various domains. It is not merely a leisure activity but serves as a crucial mechanism for children to learn about their environment, develop skills, and understand social norms. The complexity of play has led to numerous attempts to categorize its various forms, each serving distinct developmental purposes.

1. Physical Play

Physical play encompasses activities that promote the development of gross motor skills through movement. It includes running, jumping, climbing, and engaging in sports or active games. This

type of play is crucial for fostering physical fitness, coordination, and balance (Power, 2000). According to Pellegrini and Smith (1998), physical play allows children to experiment with their bodies, enhance their spatial awareness, and build confidence in their physical abilities. Engaging in physical play not only supports physical health but also promotes social skills as children often play in groups, learning to cooperate, share, and negotiate during games (Duncan & Rachid, 2003).

2. Play with Objects

Play with objects involves the manipulation of various materials, such as toys, blocks, or everyday items, allowing children to explore their properties and functions. This type of play is essential for cognitive development as it encourages problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). For instance, when children engage in block play, they learn about balance, gravity, and spatial relationships while also enhancing their fine motor skills. According to Piaget (1962), play with objects is a key aspect of children's cognitive development, as it facilitates hands-on exploration and experimentation, leading to a deeper understanding of the world around them.

3. Symbolic Play

Symbolic play, also known as imaginative or pretend play, involves using objects or actions to represent something else. This type of play is particularly important for language development and cognitive flexibility (Singer & Singer, 1990). During symbolic play, children often engage in role-playing scenarios, using their imagination to create narratives and explore different perspectives. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that symbolic play allows children to practice social roles and negotiate meanings within a safe context, fostering their understanding of social dynamics. Furthermore, symbolic play enhances creativity, as children learn to think abstractly and generate novel ideas (Bergen, 2002).

4. Socio-Dramatic Play

Socio-dramatic play is a specific form of symbolic play that involves social interaction among children as they engage in role-playing and storytelling. This type of play often includes themes of everyday life, such as playing house, school, or doctor, and requires cooperation and negotiation among participants (McMahon, 2011). Socio-dramatic play is crucial for developing social skills, as children learn to communicate, share ideas, and resolve conflicts (Miller & Almon, 2009). Additionally, it fosters emotional development by allowing children to express and understand their feelings and those of others (Thompson, 2012). Engaging in socio-dramatic play helps children build empathy, enhance their social awareness, and navigate complex social situations.

5. Games with Rules

Games with rules introduce a structured approach to play, where participants must follow specific guidelines to achieve a goal. This type of play is significant for teaching children about fairness, turn-taking, and strategic thinking (Berk, 2009). Games with rules, such as board games, card games, or organized sports, require children to engage in problem-solving and decision-making, enhancing their cognitive and social skills (Smith, 2010). Furthermore, engaging in games with rules fosters self-regulation, as children learn to manage their impulses, cooperate with peers, and accept outcomes gracefully (Lobo & Winsler, 2006). Research indicates that this type of play can positively impact children's academic performance by promoting critical thinking and cooperative skills necessary for success in structured environments (Zarbatany et al., 2009).

In summary, the various types of play physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, socio-dramatic play, and games with rules each serve essential roles in children's development. They contribute to physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and creative growth, providing a holistic approach to learning and development. Recognizing the significance of these types of play in early childhood education can inform teaching practices and promote environments that foster

meaningful play experiences. By supporting diverse play opportunities, educators and caregivers can help children develop the skills necessary for lifelong learning and success.

2.3.2 Play in Early Childhood Education

Play-based pedagogy has emerged as a critical approach in early childhood education (ECE), promoting children's holistic development through structured and unstructured play activities. Recent research emphasizes that play is not merely a break from academic learning; rather, it is an essential component of children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020). Scholars and educators advocate for play-based pedagogies that engage children actively, fostering their intrinsic motivation and encouraging exploration, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The philosophy of play as a learning medium aligns with constructivist theories, notably those articulated by Piaget and Vygotsky, who highlighted the role of active engagement and social interaction in learning (Berk & Winsler, 2020).

Incorporating play into the curriculum allows children to engage in experiential learning, where they can explore concepts and ideas in a meaningful context. For instance, through imaginative play, children develop language skills, social understanding, and emotional intelligence as they navigate various roles and scenarios (Ginsburg, 2007). This type of engagement supports the development of critical thinking and cognitive flexibility, essential skills for success in later academic settings (Saracho & Spodek, 2016). The use of play-based pedagogy has also been linked to improved academic outcomes, as children who participate in play-centered learning demonstrate enhanced problem-solving abilities and creativity compared to their peers in more traditional learning environments (Zosh et al., 2018).

The role of the educator in play-based settings is pivotal. Educators are not merely facilitators; they must also create environments that are rich in resources and opportunities for children to

engage in various forms of play (Siraj et al., 2019). This involves understanding children's interests, observing their interactions, and providing guidance that encourages deeper exploration. Effective educators recognize that play is inherently a social process; thus, they promote collaborative activities that foster peer interactions, enhancing social skills and emotional development (Owen & Loo, 2021). Furthermore, the integration of play into the curriculum requires educators to be well-versed in the developmental stages of children, ensuring that the play activities are appropriately challenging and aligned with learning objectives (Edwards, 2019).

The benefits of play-based pedagogy extend beyond cognitive development; they also encompass social and emotional growth. Play provides a safe space for children to express their emotions, practice self-regulation, and build resilience (Miller & Almon, 2009). Engaging in play helps children learn to negotiate, share, and resolve conflicts, skills that are essential for their social interactions and relationships (Smith et al., 2020). Research indicates that children who engage in regular play demonstrate greater empathy and social competence, as they learn to understand the perspectives of others through cooperative play experiences (Bergen, 2002).

Despite the recognized benefits of play-based pedagogy, challenges persist in its implementation. A significant barrier is the pressure of standardized testing and academic achievement that pervades many educational systems (Hyvonen, 2011). Educators may feel compelled to prioritize formal instruction over play, fearing that play-based approaches may hinder academic readiness (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Additionally, there may be a lack of training and professional development opportunities for educators to effectively integrate play into their teaching practices (Goncu & Gaskins, 2018). To overcome these barriers, systemic changes are needed within educational frameworks to value play as a legitimate form of learning.

Furthermore, the cultural context plays a critical role in shaping the perception and implementation of play-based pedagogy. Different cultural attitudes towards play and education can influence how educators design and facilitate play experiences (Berk & Winsler, 2020). In some cultures, play is seen as an essential part of learning, while in others, it may be perceived as a secondary activity that distracts from academic pursuits. Understanding these cultural differences is crucial for educators seeking to implement play-based approaches effectively, ensuring that play is respected and valued within their specific educational context (Tizard et al., 2019).

In conclusion, play-based pedagogy is a powerful approach to early childhood education that nurtures children's holistic development. By embedding play into the curriculum, educators can foster children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth, creating engaging and meaningful learning experiences. However, to fully realize the potential of play-based pedagogy, educators must navigate the challenges posed by standardized education systems and cultural attitudes toward play. Continued advocacy for play as an essential component of learning, along with ongoing professional development for educators, will be crucial in promoting play-based pedagogy in ECE. As research continues to illuminate the benefits of play, it is essential for educational policies to embrace and support play as a vital part of early childhood education, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and development.

2.3.3 Benefits of Play in Early Childhood Education

Play is widely recognized as a critical element of early childhood education, serving as both a natural and engaging way for young children to learn. Research underscores that play not only provides enjoyment but also plays a vital role in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. The integration of play into early childhood education has been supported

by numerous educational theorists and researchers, who assert that it fosters a holistic learning experience.

Cognitive Development

Play is instrumental in enhancing cognitive development in young children. Through play, children actively engage with their environment, experiment, and explore new concepts, which fosters problem-solving skills, creativity, and intellectual growth. Piaget (1962) argued that play, particularly symbolic play, allows children to practice their representational thinking, where they learn to use symbols and abstract concepts. For instance, when a child pretends that a block is a car, they are exercising cognitive skills that support later academic learning, such as reading and mathematics.

Moreover, play supports executive function, which is crucial for self-regulation and future learning. Bodrova and Leong (2007) found that children involved in pretend play exhibit greater self-control and the ability to follow rules, as they navigate scenarios with peers. These activities enhance attention, memory, and flexibility, which are essential for later academic success. Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, asserting that children learn best in social contexts where play encourages collaborative problem-solving and the development of language and communication skills.

Social and Emotional Development

Play provides a context for children to develop essential social and emotional skills. Through play, children learn to interact with their peers, negotiate roles, resolve conflicts, and collaborate, which enhances their social competencies. Parten (1932) identified different stages of social play, from solitary play to cooperative play, illustrating how children's social skills evolve through various

types of interaction. Cooperative play, in particular, fosters teamwork, leadership, and communication, as children work together to achieve common goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Play also promotes emotional development by providing children with opportunities to express and manage their emotions. During play, children often act out different roles, which helps them understand their feelings and the emotions of others. According to Erikson (1963), play is a critical medium through which children build self-esteem, develop empathy, and gain a sense of mastery over their environment. As children navigate emotional challenges during play, such as taking turns or sharing, they learn important emotional regulation skills that contribute to their overall well-being.

Physical Development

In addition to cognitive and social benefits, play contributes significantly to children's physical development. Physical play, which involves activities such as running, jumping, and climbing, helps children develop fine and gross motor skills, coordination, and strength. Frost et al. (2019) highlight that active play is essential for children's physical health, promoting cardiovascular fitness, muscle development, and balance. Moreover, activities that involve manipulating objects, such as building with blocks or drawing, improve fine motor skills, which are important for tasks like writing.

Research also shows that physical play is linked to better overall health outcomes for children. Ginsburg (2007) notes that regular engagement in physical play can help prevent childhood obesity and related health problems. Additionally, outdoor play provides opportunities for children to interact with nature, which can reduce stress and enhance their mental and physical well-being.

Language and Communication Skills

Play, especially in social contexts, enhances children's language and communication skills. During play, children frequently engage in conversations with their peers, negotiate roles, and explain their ideas, which supports language development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that language is a critical tool for cognitive development, and through play, children internalize new vocabulary and concepts as they interact with others.

Pretend play, in particular, is closely linked to language development. In sociodramatic play, children create narratives, adopt different roles, and use language to communicate their thoughts and ideas (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). This form of play allows children to practice their verbal skills in a natural, engaging way, which lays the foundation for more complex language use in academic settings. According to Weisberg et al. (2013), children who regularly engage in pretend play tend to exhibit higher levels of language complexity and creativity in their speech.

Creativity and Imagination

Play is a natural platform for fostering creativity and imagination in young children. Through imaginative play, children explore different scenarios, roles, and ideas, which encourages creative thinking. Play allows children to experiment with new solutions, challenge their understanding of the world, and think outside the box. Piaget (1962) emphasized that play is a fundamental aspect of children's cognitive development, as it enables them to explore the symbolic use of objects and engage in abstract thinking.

Moreover, play nurtures children's imagination by offering opportunities to express themselves in non-restrictive ways. For example, during pretend play, children might imagine they are superheroes or doctors, creating their own rules and scenarios. This freedom to explore different identities and worlds fosters not only creativity but also problem-solving and innovation. As

Lieberman (1977) suggests, play provides children with the flexibility to think in divergent ways, which is essential for creative development.

The benefits of play in early childhood education are multifaceted, impacting cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language development. Play encourages problem-solving, creativity, and executive function while fostering essential social and emotional skills like empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Additionally, play promotes physical health and the development of fine and gross motor skills. In language development, play serves as a platform for practicing communication and building vocabulary. As research continues to highlight the value of play in early learning, educators are increasingly recognizing the importance of integrating play-based approaches into early childhood education to support the holistic development of young children.

2.4 Factors That Influence Teachers in Play-Based Teaching

Play-based teaching is an approach that uses play as a main method of teaching and learning in early childhood education. While many teachers recognize the importance of play, their decision to adopt or reject play-based methods is influenced by several factors. These include their knowledge and training, beliefs about teaching and learning, availability of resources, curriculum demands, school environment, parental expectations, and support from educational authorities.

One of the major factors that influence teachers in adopting play-based teaching is their knowledge and understanding of the concept. Teachers who are well-informed about the benefits of play-based learning are more likely to use it in their classrooms. According to Adu-Gyamfi and Adjei (2019), many early childhood educators in Ghana are aware of play-based pedagogy, but their knowledge is sometimes limited or inconsistent. This lack of deep understanding makes it difficult for them to apply the method effectively. When teachers are not well trained or lack continuous professional development, they may not feel confident in using play as a teaching tool.

In addition, a teacher's beliefs and attitudes about education strongly influence their teaching methods. Some teachers believe that children learn best through structured, formal lessons rather than through play. These beliefs may be based on personal experiences, cultural values, or the way they were trained. Research shows that teachers who believe in the value of child-centered learning and who see children as active learners are more open to using play-based teaching (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). On the other hand, those who see play as simply for fun or as a reward for completing work may not use it as an educational strategy.

The availability of teaching and learning resources also plays a big role. Play-based learning often requires materials such as toys, games, role-play items, blocks, art supplies, and outdoor play equipment. In many schools, especially in rural areas like Kumbungu District, there is a shortage of these resources. Without materials, teachers may find it hard to organize meaningful play activities. As Boakye and Ampiah (2017) noted, lack of resources is one of the major challenges in implementing play-based learning in Ghanaian schools.

Another influencing factor is the demands of the curriculum. In some cases, the curriculum is rigid or too academic, leaving little room for play-based activities. Teachers are under pressure to complete syllabus requirements, prepare learners for exams, and show measurable academic progress. As a result, they may feel that using play will slow down learning or reduce time for covering content. According to Saracho and Spodek (2006), when early childhood curricula are dominated by academic goals, teachers tend to reduce or eliminate play activities in favor of more formal instruction.

The school environment and leadership support also affect how teachers use play-based pedagogy. A school that encourages creative methods and gives teachers the freedom to experiment is more likely to support play-based learning. On the other hand, in schools where the headteachers focus

mostly on test scores and formal instruction, teachers may feel restricted. Leadership attitudes, availability of space for play, and a supportive culture are all important. As shown in a study by Torkornoo and Asare (2020), teachers were more willing to use play-based methods when school leaders provided encouragement, resources, and time.

Teachers are also influenced by parental expectations and community beliefs. In some communities, especially those with limited understanding of early childhood education, parents expect children to be taught through formal lessons and written work. These parents may view play as a waste of time or something that should happen at home. Teachers may feel pressured to meet parents' expectations by using more formal teaching methods, even if they personally believe in play-based learning. According to Osei-Poku and Gyimah (2018), when parents understand the value of play in learning, they are more likely to support play-based approaches in school.

Another important factor is the level of teacher training and professional development. Teachers who receive pre-service and in-service training on how to plan and manage play-based activities are more confident and capable. Unfortunately, in Ghana, many early childhood teachers either do not have specialized training or do not receive regular updates on modern teaching methods (Adu-Gyamfi & Adjei, 2019). Training helps teachers understand the link between play and learning, assess children during play, and align play with curriculum goals. Without this, teachers may not know how to use play effectively in the classroom.

Moreover, teacher workload and class size are practical factors that influence the use of play. In overcrowded classrooms, managing children during play can become difficult. Teachers may choose traditional teaching methods that are easier to control. Also, with a high number of learners and limited time, it can be challenging to organize different play activities for different learners.

This makes play-based teaching less appealing, especially when teachers are already stressed or overworked (Essel & Opoku-Mensah, 2020).

In some cases, the lack of monitoring and evaluation by education officers or district supervisors also affects implementation. If teachers are not observed or guided on how to use play-based teaching, they may not feel motivated to use it. Supervision that focuses only on lesson plans, textbooks, and exams does not encourage teachers to try alternative methods. On the other hand, when supervisors appreciate and reward innovative teaching, teachers are more likely to use play-based strategies.

Another factor is the cultural understanding of play. In some Ghanaian settings, play is seen mostly as a social or recreational activity rather than a learning tool. Teachers who grow up in such cultures may carry those views into their teaching practices. Unless they are exposed to new perspectives through training or peer learning, their traditional views may prevent them from using play as a central teaching approach. According to Nsiah-Asare and Oppong (2019), changing these perceptions requires community sensitization and teacher re-orientation.

Technology can also play a role in shaping teachers' attitudes and abilities to use play-based learning. In more urban settings, digital tools and multimedia resources help teachers create interactive and playful learning environments. However, in rural districts like Kumbungu, access to technology is often limited. This digital divide means that teachers rely mostly on manual play tools, which may not always be available or effective. Improving access to technology could make it easier for teachers to explore new forms of play-based instruction (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015).

Additionally, teachers are influenced by their previous experiences with play—both as learners and as educators. A teacher who had positive experiences with learning through play in their

training or childhood is more likely to value it in their own teaching. Peer influence also plays a part. Teachers who see their colleagues using play successfully may feel encouraged to try it themselves. Professional learning communities and peer support can therefore be strong motivators (Saracho, 2012).

Play-based learning is an essential pedagogical approach in early childhood education (ECE), facilitating children's holistic development across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains. The role of teachers is pivotal in the effective implementation of this approach. Their understanding of the fundamental concepts of play-based learning is crucial for its successful application in educational settings. Research indicates that teachers well-versed in the principles of play-based learning can create environments conducive to active learning and developmentally appropriate practices (Wood, 2014). This pedagogical approach emphasizes child-directed activities, allowing children to explore and engage in hands-on experiences (Bodrova & Leong, 2019). It encompasses both structured play, which has specific learning objectives, and unstructured play, which provides children with greater freedom in their explorations.

Teachers knowledgeable about these concepts are more likely to offer diverse learning experiences tailored to the individual needs of young learners. For instance, when teachers know how to seamlessly integrate playful activities into academic learning such as literacy or numeracy games they can enhance both the educational and developmental aspects of children's experiences (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). This understanding requires educators to perceive play as a meaningful and integral component of early learning rather than as an optional or supplementary activity.

Holistic development in early childhood encompasses physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Play-based pedagogy supports this comprehensive development by allowing children to investigate their environments, interact with peers, and engage in problem-solving (Bergen &

Mauer, 2020). Teachers who grasp the significance of play in fostering holistic development can design activities that support multiple learning areas simultaneously. For instance, activities that involve physical movement, such as running or building with blocks, promote fine motor skills and spatial awareness (Frost et al., 2019).

Moreover, play-based learning encourages social development through cooperative play, where children learn to share, negotiate, and communicate effectively with peers (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2019). Educators who acknowledge these benefits can effectively advocate for play-based learning, emphasizing its role not only as a developmental tool but also as a preparatory strategy for future academic and social success. In contrast, teachers lacking an understanding of how play-based pedagogy contributes to holistic development may prioritize traditional, teacher-directed approaches that fail to engage children fully in their learning processes (Edwards, 2017).

Adequate training is vital for teachers to implement play-based learning confidently in early childhood education. Numerous studies highlight the necessity for specialized training to cultivate the skills needed to develop play-based lesson plans and learning environments (Bredekamp & Copple, 2017). However, research shows that many early childhood educators feel inadequately trained in the play-based approach during their pre-service or in-service education (Kim, 2018). This lack of preparation can create uncertainty regarding how to balance play with academic curriculum demands, resulting in fewer meaningful play experiences in their classrooms.

Teachers who receive sufficient training in play-based approaches report higher confidence levels in designing and delivering lessons. Professional development opportunities, including workshops and seminars, equip educators with the knowledge and tools to create engaging and developmentally appropriate play activities (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Ongoing professional

development also keeps teachers informed about the latest research and best practices in play-based pedagogy, enabling them to refine their instructional strategies continuously.

Designing lesson plans that integrate play-based learning is a crucial skill for early childhood educators. Effective lesson planning aligns educational objectives with play activities that foster learning in a natural and engaging manner (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2019). Teachers confident in this area are more likely to incorporate both structured and unstructured play into their teaching, cultivating a balanced and effective learning environment. For example, a teacher might design a lesson featuring a science activity where children engage in exploratory play with water and sand, encouraging curiosity and problem-solving while meeting curriculum goals.

Conversely, teachers lacking confidence in designing such lessons may resort to more traditional, teacher-centered methods that do not adequately engage young learners. Confidence in lesson design often correlates with both training and experience. Teachers with proper training and support tend to feel more prepared to develop play-based activities that address the developmental needs of their students (Marcon, 2017).

Awareness of different play types, including structured and unstructured play, is critical for effective teaching in early childhood education. Structured play involves activities with specific learning objectives and adult guidance, while unstructured play allows children the autonomy to explore and create independently (Lillard, 2020). Educators who appreciate the value of both play types are better equipped to create diverse learning experiences that meet various developmental goals. For instance, during structured play, teachers might lead a counting game or a role-playing activity that enhances numeracy or social skills (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). In contrast, during unstructured play, children may choose their activities, promoting independence, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Veraksa et al., 2018). Teachers who recognize the importance of both

play types can strike a balance, enabling children to benefit from guided instruction while also fostering self-directed exploration.

Teachers often need to communicate the benefits of play-based learning to parents and caregivers, particularly in contexts where academic achievement is heavily emphasized (Miller & Almon, 2021). Parents may have concerns that play does not contribute to the development of academic skills, prompting educators to advocate for play-based approaches by highlighting their role in cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Wood, 2014). Teachers who effectively articulate these benefits are more likely to secure parental support, fostering a cohesive and supportive learning environment for children.

Moreover, educators who can express the value of play-based learning help bridge the gap between home and school, ensuring parents comprehend how play aids in their child's development. This can be achieved through regular communication, parent workshops, or observation days, allowing parents to witness firsthand how play-based activities enhance learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Regularly employing play-based strategies is a key indicator of teachers' commitment to this pedagogical approach. Educators who consistently incorporate play-based methods create classrooms that are dynamic, engaging, and responsive to young learners' needs (Fleer, 2017). Such teachers often include a variety of play activities, from dramatic play to outdoor exploration, ensuring children are actively involved in their learning processes.

Educators who regularly utilize play-based strategies typically observe positive outcomes in their students, such as increased engagement, curiosity, and problem-solving abilities (Bergen & Mauer, 2020). Furthermore, consistent application of play-based learning fosters a more positive classroom atmosphere where children feel safe, supported, and encouraged to take risks in their learning.

In summary, teachers' familiarity with play-based learning concepts, their understanding of its benefits for holistic development, and their confidence in implementing these strategies are crucial factors for effectively utilizing play in early childhood education. Adequate training, awareness of various play types, and the ability to communicate the benefits to parents and caregivers further enhance teachers' capacity to create engaging, developmentally appropriate learning environments. Regular implementation of play-based strategies can transform classrooms into dynamic spaces that nurture children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth, contributing to their overall development.

2.5 Play-based Activities used by Early Childhood Educators

Play-based activities are central to the pedagogy of early childhood education (ECE), as they not only facilitate learning but also contribute to the holistic development of young children. Educators in early childhood settings utilize various types of play-based activities to foster cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth among their learners.

One of the primary types of play-based activities used by early childhood educators is dramatic play, which allows children to engage in role-playing scenarios that mimic real-life situations. Through dramatic play, children can explore social roles, negotiate interactions, and practice problem-solving skills (Bergen, 2002). For example, when children participate in a grocery store role-play, they learn about money management, social interactions, and language skills. Educators facilitate this type of play by providing props, such as play money, shopping lists, and pretend food items, which enrich the experience and promote engagement (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

Construction play is another vital activity in early childhood education. It encompasses various forms of building, such as using blocks, Legos, or natural materials, which helps children develop spatial awareness, fine motor skills, and creativity (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). During construction

play, children can experiment with balance and gravity, learn about cause and effect, and enhance their problem-solving abilities. Educators can enhance construction play by introducing challenges, such as building a bridge or creating a specific structure, which encourages children to think critically and work collaboratively (Frost et al., 2019).

Sensory play is also an essential component of play-based activities in ECE. It involves activities that stimulate the senses, such as water play, sand play, or using materials like rice, beans, or dough (Miller & Almon, 2021). Sensory play is particularly beneficial for young children, as it promotes exploration, discovery, and creativity while supporting cognitive and language development. For instance, when children engage in water play, they can experiment with pouring, measuring, and mixing, which enhances their understanding of basic mathematical concepts. Educators play a crucial role in facilitating sensory play by providing a variety of materials and opportunities for children to engage in open-ended exploration (Bergen & Mauer, 2020).

Outdoor play is another critical aspect of play-based learning, as it provides children with opportunities for physical activity and connection with nature. Outdoor play can include activities such as climbing, running, jumping, or exploring natural environments (Fleer, 2017). Engaging in outdoor play not only supports physical development but also promotes social skills, such as teamwork and cooperation. For example, when children play games like tag or engage in group activities like obstacle courses, they learn to communicate, negotiate rules, and work collaboratively with their peers (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Educators can facilitate outdoor play by ensuring a safe and stimulating environment and providing guidance and encouragement as children explore their surroundings.

Artistic play, including activities such as painting, drawing, and crafting, is vital for fostering creativity and self-expression in young learners. Through artistic play, children develop fine motor

skills, enhance their cognitive abilities, and express their emotions (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2019). For instance, when children engage in painting activities, they can experiment with colors, shapes, and textures, allowing them to explore their creativity and develop an appreciation for the arts. Educators can support artistic play by providing various materials and encouraging children to express themselves freely (Miller & Almon, 2021).

Games are another popular form of play-based activity in early childhood education. These can range from traditional board games to outdoor games that promote cooperative play and turn-taking (Lillard, 2020). Games provide children with opportunities to practice essential skills, such as counting, problem-solving, and strategic thinking. For example, playing a simple counting game can help reinforce numeracy skills, while board games can enhance critical thinking and social skills. Educators can choose age-appropriate games that align with learning objectives and facilitate opportunities for children to play together, fostering social interactions and teamwork (Parker & Thomsen, 2019).

Music and movement activities also play a significant role in play-based learning. Through music and movement, children develop gross motor skills, coordination, and rhythm while also expressing themselves creatively (Bergen & Mauer, 2020). Activities such as dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments allow children to explore their physical capabilities and enhance their social skills by participating in group activities. Educators can incorporate music and movement into their curriculum by providing opportunities for children to engage in guided dances, sing songs, or explore musical instruments, creating an enjoyable and dynamic learning environment (Frost et al., 2019).

Science exploration is increasingly recognized as an essential component of play-based learning. Educators often incorporate hands-on science activities, such as simple experiments or nature

investigations, that encourage children to explore their world and ask questions (Marcon, 2017). Through science exploration, children develop critical thinking skills and a curiosity about the natural world. For instance, when children observe the growth of plants or engage in simple experiments with water and soil, they learn about scientific concepts while developing observational and analytical skills. Educators can enhance science exploration by providing materials for experimentation and encouraging children to share their observations and findings (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015).

Collaborative play is another vital aspect of play-based learning, where children work together to achieve a common goal. This type of play fosters teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. Collaborative play can be facilitated through group projects, such as building a large structure with blocks or creating a community mural (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Educators can support collaborative play by promoting positive interactions among children and providing guidance on effective communication and teamwork strategies.

The effectiveness of play-based activities in promoting children's development is well-documented in the literature. Studies have shown that children engaged in play-based learning demonstrate higher levels of engagement, creativity, and problem-solving skills compared to those exposed to more traditional, teacher-directed approaches (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Lillard, 2020). Additionally, play-based learning has been linked to improved social skills and emotional regulation, as children learn to navigate relationships and express their feelings in a supportive environment (Miller & Almon, 2021).

Moreover, the role of the educator in facilitating play-based activities cannot be overstated. Educators must possess a deep understanding of play and its significance in children's development. This includes recognizing the various types of play, selecting appropriate activities,

and creating a supportive environment that fosters exploration and discovery (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2019). Continuous professional development and training in play-based pedagogy are essential for educators to remain informed about best practices and to effectively implement play-based activities in their classrooms (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

In conclusion, play-based activities are integral to early childhood education, providing diverse opportunities for children to learn and grow holistically. Through dramatic play, construction play, sensory experiences, outdoor exploration, artistic expression, games, music and movement, science exploration, and collaborative play, educators can create engaging learning environments that support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. The effectiveness of play-based learning is well-supported in the literature, emphasizing the need for educators to understand and implement these activities to foster positive outcomes for young learners. As early childhood education continues to evolve, the importance of play-based pedagogy remains central to nurturing the next generation of learners.

2.6 Support Systems Needed for Effective Play-Based Teaching

For play-based teaching to be effectively implemented in the Kumbungu District, teachers need strong support systems. One key area of support is continuous professional development. Training workshops and mentorship programs can help teachers develop skills in integrating play-based learning into their lessons (Weisberg et al., 2016). Studies in Ghana have shown that teachers who receive hands-on training in play-based methodologies are more confident and effective in using play for instruction (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011).

Provision of adequate teaching and learning resources is another critical support factor. Schools must be equipped with appropriate play materials, such as puzzles, building blocks, storybooks, and outdoor play facilities (UNESCO, 2019). Research by Pyle and Bigelow (2015) found that teachers who have access to diverse play materials are more likely to incorporate play-based

methods in their classrooms. Government and non-governmental organizations can play a role in supplying these resources to under-resourced schools (Moloi, 2015).

Another crucial aspect is support from school administrators and policymakers. When school leadership encourages and prioritizes play-based teaching, teachers are more likely to adopt the approach (Lynch, 2015). Administrators can support teachers by allocating time for play activities within the daily schedule and recognizing play as an essential part of learning (Owusu-Mensah & Baffour, 2015).

Parental and community engagement is also important. Sensitization programs can help parents understand the value of play in learning and encourage them to support play-based activities at home (Ginsburg, 2007). Studies have shown that when parents are involved in play-based learning, children perform better academically and socially (Weisberg et al., 2016). Therefore, schools should organize workshops and meetings to educate parents on the benefits of play-based teaching (Tangkur et al., 2022).

2.7 Challenges Teachers Encounter with the Use of Play-based Pedagogy

Play-based pedagogy has become a cornerstone of early childhood education, recognized for its ability to foster cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in young children. Despite its numerous benefits, the implementation of play-based pedagogy presents several challenges for educators, particularly in kindergarten settings. These challenges can hinder the effectiveness of this approach and create barriers to its successful integration into early childhood curricula.

The GPE (2012) states that the main obstacles to ECEC programmes are low social demand for high-quality ECCE services, insufficient finance, ineffective and well-targeted interventions, and limited local and national administrative ability. Some of the issues plaguing Sub-Saharan Africa's preschool education are inadequate ECCE services, poor or nonexistent infrastructure, inadequate

teaching and learning materials, curricula that are not well suited to the requirements of the kids, and a shortage of qualified teachers.

One of the most significant challenges teachers face in implementing play-based pedagogy is the pressure to meet curriculum standards and academic benchmarks. Many educators feel constrained by a packed curriculum that leaves little room for extended periods of play-based learning (Howard, 2010). The increasing emphasis on academic readiness and standardized testing has shifted the focus away from play, leading to a reduction in the time allocated for play-based activities in the classroom. Teachers often struggle to balance the need for academic instruction with the developmental benefits of play, resulting in a tension between fulfilling curriculum requirements and providing opportunities for meaningful play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

This focus on academic readiness has led to a shift towards more structured, teacher-directed activities that prioritize measurable outcomes over exploratory and imaginative play (Miller & Almon, 2009). As a result, the time available for play-based learning is often limited to short, scheduled periods that may not be sufficient to support the full range of cognitive, social, and emotional benefits associated with this pedagogical approach (Moyles, 2015).

Moreover, the rigid structure of the school day, with its tight schedules and frequent transitions between activities, further limits opportunities for uninterrupted play (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Teachers must often make difficult choices about how to allocate time, balancing the need for academic instruction with the developmental benefits of play. This tension between curriculum demands and the principles of play-based pedagogy can undermine the effectiveness of play-based approaches in fostering holistic child development (Wood, 2014).

Time Constraints

Time constraints pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood education. Play-based learning requires sufficient time for children to engage in exploration, creativity, and social interaction, all of which are critical for holistic development. However, many early childhood centres face pressure to meet academic standards and curriculum goals within limited timeframes, often prioritizing formal instruction over play (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

One major issue is the scheduling of structured learning activities that leaves little time for extended play. As teachers focus on covering the curriculum, the time allocated for child-led play is often reduced (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play-based pedagogy thrives on unhurried, uninterrupted periods where children can explore their interests and develop skills through sustained engagement. When play is rushed or truncated, the developmental benefits, such as problem-solving, collaboration, and emotional regulation, are diminished.

Additionally, time constraints often lead to a more teacher-directed approach to play, limiting children's autonomy and creativity. According to Howard and McInnes (2019), children benefit most from self-directed play, where they can take the lead and interact with their peers. However, limited time often forces educators to intervene more, directing play in ways that align with predetermined learning outcomes, which can reduce the spontaneity and exploration essential to play-based learning.

Inadequate Resources and Materials

Another common challenge is the lack of adequate resources and materials needed to effectively implement play-based pedagogy. High-quality play materials, such as blocks, art supplies, and educational toys, are essential for fostering creativity and exploration in young children (Wood,

2014). However, many educational settings, particularly in under-resourced schools, struggle to provide these necessary materials. Financial constraints often lead to limited access to diverse and stimulating play materials, which can hinder the ability of teachers to create rich, engaging learning environments (Moyles, 2015). Without adequate resources, teachers may be forced to rely on more traditional, didactic teaching methods that do not fully engage children in the exploratory and imaginative activities central to play-based pedagogy (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Furthermore, the lack of appropriate resources can also impact the inclusivity and adaptability of play-based activities. For instance, children with different learning needs or disabilities may require specialized materials to fully participate in play-based learning (Manning, Garvis, Fleming, & Wong, 2017). The absence of such resources can limit the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy in supporting all children's developmental needs.

Classroom Management Difficulties

Classroom management during play-based activities is another significant challenge for teachers. Play-based pedagogy often involves unstructured or semi-structured activities that require teachers to manage a dynamic and sometimes chaotic classroom environment (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Unlike traditional, teacher-directed instruction, where students are expected to sit quietly and follow directions, play-based learning encourages movement, exploration, and interaction, which can lead to noise and disorder. Teachers must find a balance between allowing children the freedom to explore and ensuring that the classroom remains a conducive learning environment. Managing this balance can be particularly difficult in classrooms with large student-teacher ratios, where it is challenging to provide individualized attention to each child (Manning, Garvis, Fleming, & Wong, 2017).

Assessing children's learning outcomes through play-based pedagogy presents another challenge for teachers. Traditional assessment methods, such as tests and quizzes, are not well-suited to measuring the learning that occurs during play (Broadhead, 2006). Play-based learning often leads to the development of skills and knowledge that are difficult to quantify, such as creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction. Teachers must rely on observational assessments, which can be time-consuming and subjective, making it challenging to document and demonstrate student progress effectively (Wood & Bennett, 2000). Additionally, the lack of standardized assessment tools for play-based learning can make it difficult for teachers to align their assessments with curriculum standards and expectations (Howard, 2010).

Parental and Administrative Expectations

The expectations of parents and school administrators can also pose challenges to the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Some parents may not fully understand or appreciate the value of play in early childhood education, leading them to prioritize more traditional, academically focused teaching methods (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). This lack of support from parents can create pressure on teachers to reduce the amount of time spent on play-based activities in favor of more direct instruction. Similarly, school administrators who are focused on meeting academic benchmarks and improving standardized test scores may be less supportive of play-based approaches, further complicating teachers' efforts to implement this pedagogy effectively (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Professional Development and Training Needs

A final challenge is the need for ongoing professional development and training in play-based pedagogy. Many teachers report feeling inadequately prepared to implement play-based strategies effectively, particularly if they have been trained in more traditional, teacher-directed methods

(Moyles, 2015). Professional development opportunities that focus on the principles of play-based learning, classroom management techniques, and assessment strategies are essential for helping teachers build the skills and confidence needed to incorporate play into their teaching practices. However, access to high-quality professional development can be limited, particularly in under-resourced schools or regions (Manning et al., 2017).

Lack of space in the classroom and outdoor environment

The lack of adequate space in classrooms and outdoor school environments significantly hampers the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy in kindergarten centers. Play-based learning requires ample physical space to accommodate various activities that support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. However, overcrowded classrooms and limited outdoor areas can severely restrict the range of play activities that can be offered, ultimately affecting the quality of early childhood education.

In many kindergarten classrooms, especially in densely populated or under-resourced areas, space is often a major limitation. Overcrowded classrooms, where children have limited room to move freely, can impede the implementation of essential play-based activities such as dramatic play, block building, and sensory play (Manning, Garvis, Fleming, & Wong, 2017). These activities require sufficient space for children to explore, manipulate materials, and engage in cooperative play. When space is limited, teachers may be forced to minimize or eliminate play-based activities, resorting to more sedentary and teacher-directed methods of instruction, which do not fully engage young learners in active exploration and creativity (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Furthermore, the lack of designated areas within the classroom for different types of play, such as art corners, reading nooks, and construction zones, can reduce the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy. These spaces are crucial for encouraging children to engage in various forms of play,

each supporting different aspects of their development (Wood, 2014). Without such dedicated spaces, the opportunities for children to engage in diverse and meaningful play experiences are significantly diminished.

Similarly, outdoor play is a critical component of play-based pedagogy, offering children opportunities for physical activity, risk-taking, and social interaction in a less structured environment (Ginsburg, 2007). However, the lack of sufficient outdoor space in many kindergarten centers can severely restrict the types of play activities that can be conducted. Limited playground areas, lack of greenery, and inadequate play equipment can hinder children's ability to engage in outdoor exploration, gross motor activities, and nature-based learning experiences (Fjørtoft, 2004). Moreover, when outdoor spaces are small or poorly designed, they may not provide the necessary variety of play experiences, such as climbing, running, and imaginative play, which are essential for children's physical and social development (Moyles, 2015). The absence of natural elements like trees, sand, and water further restricts opportunities for sensory play and environmental exploration, which are key aspects of play-based pedagogy.

The constraints imposed by inadequate space can also place additional stress on educators, who must navigate these limitations while trying to implement an effective play-based curriculum. Teachers may find it challenging to organize and manage play activities in cramped environments, leading to frustration and a potential decrease in the quality of interactions between teachers and learners (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Additionally, the lack of space may result in more frequent conflicts among children as they compete for limited play areas, which can negatively impact the social and emotional climate of the classroom (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Even the most playfully inclined children will not be able to play, sufficiently for them to reap the benefits in terms of their learning and development if they are not given the time, the space, and

the independence to develop their own spontaneous and self-initiated play activities. Lester and Russell (2010) provide a very useful review of the now quite extensive literature studying children's use of urban and rural spaces for playful purposes. What emerges from this is that, in their play, children's appropriate different spaces and features within their environment which are quite unpredictable by adults, and that the richest play spaces are mostly natural and unplanned. Many urban playgrounds, designed by adults, are often too neat and tidy, and essentially often rather barren as regards playful opportunities. The most successful urban play environments are 'adventure playgrounds' which are set up so that children can adapt them and build their own spaces, using a range of natural and man-made building materials (Bartlett, 2002).

Play-based pedagogy offers significant benefits for early childhood education, but its implementation is not without challenges. Teachers face a range of obstacles, including time constraints, inadequate resources, classroom management difficulties, assessment challenges, and a lack of support from parents and administrators. Additionally, the need for ongoing professional development is critical to ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to implement play-based learning effectively. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, administrators, and policymakers to create supportive environments that prioritize the developmental needs of young children through play.

2.8 Summary of the Literature Review

The literature reviewed shows that play-based pedagogy has been widely recognized as an effective instructional approach for promoting holistic development among early childhood learners. Scholars consistently explain that play is not merely a recreational activity but a purposeful learning strategy that supports cognitive, social, emotional, and language development in early childhood settings (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020). Research indicates that when children learn through play, they demonstrate increased creativity, improved problem-solving abilities, and

greater motivation to participate in classroom activities. The review further highlights that early childhood teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes toward play-based teaching are more likely to integrate it effectively into their daily instructional activities.

The literature also reveals that the adoption of play-based teaching methods is influenced by a range of factors, including teachers' beliefs about play, their level of training, availability of teaching materials, and institutional support from school leaders and educational authorities. Studies show that teachers who view play as a valuable instructional tool tend to design more interactive and child-centered lessons, while teachers who misunderstand the role of play often prefer traditional, teacher-directed methods that limit learner engagement. This suggests that teacher perspectives play a crucial role in shaping the nature and quality of classroom interactions in early childhood settings.

Findings from previous research emphasize that teacher preparation and professional development are central to successful implementation of play-based pedagogy. Literature shows that teachers who receive appropriate training are better able to plan purposeful play activities, observe learners effectively, and link play experiences to curriculum goals. Conversely, inadequate training has been identified as a major obstacle that prevents teachers from fully utilizing play-based approaches. Studies carried out in Ghana and other African contexts confirm that many early childhood teachers feel unprepared to use play as a teaching strategy, mainly due to limited exposure during pre-service education and insufficient in-service training opportunities.

The literature review also points out several challenges that hinder the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Among the frequently mentioned challenges are large class sizes, lack of appropriate learning materials, rigid curriculum expectations, high workload, and limited time allocated for creative instructional methods. Researchers argue that when classrooms are

overcrowded and under-resourced, teachers find it difficult to provide child-centered, activity-based lessons that support individualized learning. Furthermore, some teachers face pressure from school leaders or parents who prioritize academic drills over play-based learning, thereby discouraging innovative teaching strategies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter outlined the methodological procedures that were employed in the study. To this end, the chapter presents the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, research instruments, validity and reliability, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

The positivist paradigm is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the use of scientific methods to observe, measure, and understand reality. This paradigm is rooted in the belief that knowledge is objective and can be obtained through systematic, empirical observation and quantification. Given the nature of the current study, which seeks to investigate teachers' knowledge, implementation, and challenges related to the play-based approach in early childhood education, the positivist paradigm is well-suited for several reasons.

Firstly, the positivist paradigm aligns with the study's quantitative design, which focuses on collecting numerical data through structured instruments like surveys and questionnaires. Positivism asserts that social phenomena can be studied in the same way as natural sciences, using

measurable variables and statistical analysis to uncover patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the knowledge, practices, and challenges of teachers are operationalized into measurable variables, making it possible to quantify teachers' understanding of the play-based approach and how often they implement it.

Secondly, positivism allows for the development of hypotheses that can be tested empirically. For instance, hypotheses about the relationship between teachers' levels of knowledge and their use of play-based teaching can be formed and tested using statistical techniques. Positivist research often aims to establish generalizable truths, and by using a representative sample of teachers in the Kumbungu District, the study aims to draw conclusions that could apply more broadly to similar educational contexts in Ghana (Bryman, 2016). This drive for generalizability is central to positivist research.

The positivist paradigm also emphasizes objectivity and neutrality, which are critical for ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings. Researchers operating within this paradigm strive to eliminate bias by maintaining distance from the subject matter and relying on standardized data collection methods (Cohen, et al. 2011). In this study, the use of structured surveys minimizes the risk of researcher influence, ensuring that the data reflect the genuine experiences and views of teachers. This objectivity is crucial in examining the implementation of the play-based approach, as the findings need to be free from personal or subjective interpretations to provide credible results.

Additionally, the positivist approach is justified by its focus on causality and the search for relationships between variables. The study explores how variables such as teachers' training, access to resources, and school infrastructure might influence their implementation of the play-based approach. Positivist research aims to identify such causal relationships, and by employing

statistical tools like correlation and regression analysis, this study can reveal significant factors that affect the adoption of play-based learning in early childhood education (Punch, 2013).

Furthermore, the positivist paradigm supports the study's goal of producing generalizable and replicable results. The use of structured data collection methods allows the research to be replicated in other districts or countries, providing opportunities for comparative analysis. Replicability is a hallmark of positivist research, as it contributes to the accumulation of knowledge through consistent findings across different settings (Neuman, 2014). This would be valuable in understanding whether the challenges faced by teachers in the Kumbungu District are unique or shared across similar educational contexts.

The positivist paradigm is an appropriate research framework for this study due to its emphasis on objectivity, quantification, hypothesis testing, and generalizability. By employing a quantitative design, the study aligns with the positivist belief that social phenomena, such as teachers' knowledge and practices, can be measured and analyzed scientifically. This paradigm enables the researcher to produce valid, reliable, and replicable results, contributing to the broader understanding of the implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood education.

3.2. Research Approach

The use of a quantitative approach in this study is justified by its alignment with the research objectives and the nature of the data required to examine teachers' knowledge, implementation, and challenges related to the play-based approach in early childhood education. Quantitative research is characterized by the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses, establish patterns, and make generalizable conclusions (Creswell, 2014). Several key reasons support the selection of this approach for the study.

The quantitative approach is ideal for studying phenomena that can be quantified and measured. This study seeks to understand the extent to which teachers in the Kumbungu District understand and implement the play-based approach. By using structured instruments like surveys or questionnaires, the researcher can collect data on teachers' knowledge, frequency of implementation, and the specific challenges they face. These variables are easily translated into measurable indicators, which can then be analyzed statistically to produce clear, objective results (Bryman, 2016). For example, teachers' understanding of the play-based approach can be measured using Likert scales, which quantify attitudes or perceptions.

Second, a quantitative approach enables the study to generate generalizable findings. One of the key goals of this research is to produce results that apply not only to the Kumbungu District but potentially to similar educational settings in Ghana or other countries. The use of a large sample size and statistical techniques allows for the generalization of findings beyond the specific study context (Cohen, et al. 2011). Generalizability is critical for informing policy and practice across broader educational contexts, making the quantitative approach especially suitable for this study.

Additionally, the objectivity associated with the quantitative approach further justifies its use. Quantitative research emphasizes objectivity, aiming to minimize researcher bias and ensure that the data collected reflect the true perceptions and behaviors of the participants (Neuman, 2014). In this study, the use of standardized survey instruments ensures that all respondents answer the same questions in the same manner, reducing the influence of the researcher's subjectivity on the data collection process. This objectivity is essential for understanding how teachers perceive and implement the play-based approach without being influenced by the researcher's personal views or interpretations.

Also, the use of the quantitative approach is its ability to test relationships between variables. This study aims to explore how teachers' knowledge, training, and access to resources might influence their ability to implement the play-based approach effectively. A quantitative approach allows the researcher to test these relationships using statistical tools like correlation and regression analysis (Punch, 2013). By doing so, the researcher can identify significant factors that affect the successful adoption of the play-based approach in early childhood education, contributing to evidence-based recommendations for improving its implementation.

Moreover, the reliability and replicability of the quantitative approach are key advantages. Since the data collection instruments and statistical analyses are standardized, other researchers can replicate the study in different contexts to verify the findings (Creswell, 2014). Replication enhances the credibility of the research and contributes to the broader body of knowledge on early childhood education, particularly in the implementation of play-based pedagogies.

3.3. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey design is well-suited for this study as it aligns with the research objectives of exploring teachers' knowledge, implementation, and challenges related to the play-based approach in early childhood education. A descriptive survey is used to collect detailed information about existing conditions, attitudes, or behaviors of a population, providing a snapshot of the current situation (Creswell, 2014). This design allows the researcher to gather comprehensive data from a large group of teachers within the Kumbungu District, enabling the study to achieve its objective of understanding the prevalence and nature of play-based pedagogy in this specific context.

3.4 Study Area

Kumbungu District is one of the administrative districts in the Northern Region of Ghana. It was carved out of the Tolon-Kumbungu District and officially became a separate district in 2012. The district capital is Kumbungu, a small but growing town that serves as the administrative and economic center of the area. The district is predominantly rural, with most of its population engaged in farming and small-scale trading.

Kumbungu District is located in the northern part of Ghana and shares boundaries with Tolon District to the south, Savelugu Municipal to the east, and North Gonja District to the west. It covers a land area of approximately 1,599 square kilometers. The district experiences a tropical savannah climate, characterized by two main seasons: the rainy season (May to October) and the dry season (November to April). The dry season is influenced by the Harmattan winds, which bring dry and dusty conditions. The main rivers in the district include the White Volta, which supports farming activities.

The district is home to a population of over 40,000 people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The majority of the people belong to the Dagomba ethnic group, who mainly speak Dagbani. Other ethnic groups, such as the Gonjas, Mamprusis, and some settler groups, also live in the district. The main religion practiced in the area is Islam, followed by traditional African beliefs and Christianity.

Agriculture is the backbone of the district's economy. The majority of the people are smallholder farmers, cultivating crops such as maize, rice, millet, yam, groundnut, and vegetables. Livestock rearing, particularly cattle, goats, and sheep, is also common. The district has fertile lands suitable for farming, but challenges such as erratic rainfall, poor irrigation systems, and post-harvest losses affect productivity. In addition to farming, some residents engage in small-scale trading, fishing, and handicraft production, including weaving and pottery.

Kumbungu District has several public and private basic schools, but access to quality education remains a challenge due to inadequate school infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and limited teaching and learning materials. Many children travel long distances to attend school, and some drop out due to poverty and early marriage. The district has a few senior high schools (SHS) and vocational training centers, but many students continue their education in Tamale, the regional capital.

The district has several health centers and clinics, but access to healthcare services is still a challenge, especially in remote areas. The Kumbungu District Hospital serves as the main health facility, providing basic medical care. However, many residents rely on traditional medicine due to financial constraints and inadequate healthcare facilities. Malaria, malnutrition, and waterborne diseases are common health concerns in the area.

Kumbungu District is an important agricultural area in the Northern Region of Ghana. While the district has great potential for growth, it faces challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and economic difficulties. Addressing these challenges through better policies and development programs can improve the living conditions of people in the district.

3.5 Population

The study population included teachers from public early childhood education centres under the Ministry of Education within the Kumbungu District. As of the time of this study, the total population of teachers in early childhood education centres in the District was 186 teachers (Kumbungu Education Directorate Office Report, 2023).

3.6 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The simple random sampling technique was used to select 93 public early childhood education centres and an equal number of selected teachers were distributed among the selected schools

targeted for the study. Random selection was conducted by numbering all childhood education centres. A computer-based random number generator was used to identify the chosen sample for the study. Similarly, the list of names of childhood education teachers was obtained and randomly selected using the lottery method. The total population of teachers in early childhood education centres in the Kumbungu District was 186 teachers (Kumbungu Education Service Office Report, 2023). The study used a Confidence interval (margin error) of five, with 95%, as a confidence level and a percentage of 50% distribution, which is the most conservative, and a constant z-score of 1.96. In all, one hundred and twenty seven (127) teachers were selected for the study. This number was obtained through the use of Kracjcie and Morgan's table of sample distribution which shows that a population of 186 will give a sample size of 127.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The study employed questionnaires as the data collection instrument. There were four sections of the designed questionnaires, which employed the four-point Likert scale. The first section elicited demographic information about the teachers in the early childhood educational centres. The second and third sections covered the knowledge level as well as practices regarding key areas of the practice of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the district. The final section addressed questions relating to the barriers to the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Apart from the question in Section A, the rest of the Sections contained questions measured using the four-point Likert scaled items. All the items will be positive and will be scored as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

3.8 Validity of the Instrument

Validity is the exactness and precision of deductions based on the findings from the research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The validation of the instrument was carried out to check

correctness of the data collection instruments during the pilot study. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) emphasizes that pre-testing of study instruments, before the actual study support criterion and construct validation of the tools. Criterion and construct validation were established through pre-testing the instruments used in the study. This checks the appropriateness of the data collection instruments.

In order to enhance the validity of the study, the questionnaire was given to my supervisor for expert assessment. This ensured both face and content-related evidence to the items and examined whether the items related to the research questions and also comprehensively covered the details of the study. Content validity was ensured by effectively indicating the interests of the study (Kothari, & Carg, 2014). Comments were made on the language, clarity, relevance of the items, format, structure, and content of the research instruments to deem them acceptable. Suggestions were made on rewording questions, adding questions, and deleting some irrelevant questions.

3.9 Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability is generally defined as the degree to which a measure of a construct is consistent and dependable. Petters et al., (2015) further defined reliability as the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields certain results when the entity being measured has not changed. Consistency of the instrument was achieved through a number of initiatives. Reliability reveals that when procedures of the study are repeated, the same results are expected (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A reliability test was carried out with the purpose of testing the consistency of the research instrument. The research instruments were improved by revising or deleting items.

3.10 Pilot-Testing

A pilot test of the instrument was carried out to check the reliability of the instrument. The pre-testing aimed to improve the reliability of the instrument. The respondents were given draft copies

of the questionnaire. The respondents were told to discuss verbally and frankly with me any ambiguity, incoherence, or incomprehension that they would experience about any aspect of the draft questionnaire. The necessary corrections were affected after the trial testing. The piloting test results were used to determine the reliability of the instruments with Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency. The instrument was pilot-tested in the Savelugu Municipal due to the similar characteristics it has with the study area. The Statistical Product for Service Solution (Version 25.0) was used for the computations. A Cronbach Alpha figure of 0.799 was obtained from the pilot testing which means that the instrument was reliable (Gani et al., 2020).

3.11 Data Collection Procedure

Before embarking on the data collection, an introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Early Childhood to seek permission from the school's management. The letter and clearance form spelled out the purpose of the study, the need for individual participation and anonymity as well as confidentially of respondents' responses. After establishing the necessary contact with the school management, permission was sought for the administration of the instrument. The researcher trained research assistants to assist in the data collection. These research assistants were trained on how to talk to respondents, how to explain certain difficult questions to respondents, and other equally important information that will enable the researcher to have uniform information.

3.12 Data Analysis Procedures

The completed questionnaires were serially numbered and coded into the SPSS software (Version 25.0). The analysis involved coding, organizing, describing, interpreting, tabulating and drawing conclusions. The analysis was done in two stages. The first stage of analysis focused on descriptive

statistics that involved computing frequencies, and percentages. In the second stage, means and standard deviations were used to analysed the research questions.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

To abide by the ethical principles of the study, the study addressed some ethical concerns which will include informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Informed consent

Informed consent affords prospective participants the opportunity to accept or decline to engage in the research. It describes the need for participants to understand the aims, objectives, and potential harm that such involvement may have on them (Seidman, 2016). In this study, the purpose of the study was carefully reviewed with the participants before they were involved in the study.

Anonymity

The anonymity of study respondents was highly taken into consideration in the present study. Gujarati (2013) pointed out that anonymity is a vital issue in research ethics because it gives the participants the opportunity to have their identities concealed. In this study, fictitious names were used for identification purposes that could not be traced to the participants. Codes were also adopted where necessary to ensure the anonymity of information and harm. In order not to unnecessarily invade the privacy of participants, the researcher made a prior visit to the schools before the data collection commenced. This was to explain the purpose of the study to the respondents and how to not invade their privacy as participants. Neither names nor any identifiable information from respondents was taken as a way of ensuring the ethical principle of anonymity. This was to prevent possible victimization of respondents where certain responses may be viewed as unpalatable to other stakeholders.

Confidentiality

On the issue of confidentiality, an effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of the responses of the participants. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one known to them would have access to the information provided and none of the respondents' names was be recorded in the study. Most essentially on the ethical issues, pieces of information that was cited from earlier studies to support the study was duly acknowledged through both citation and referencing in order to avoid academic dishonesty otherwise known as plagiary

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents data analysis, findings, presentation and interpretation of findings. The purpose of the study intends to investigate the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District. Data was collected through the use of distributed Questionnaires and Interviews from 117 respondents from the District. The findings of the study are presented as per research questions of the study in the following sections.

4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

This section of the analysis focuses on the demographic data of respondents which includes Sex, age, educational qualification, as well as Teaching experience.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	63	49.6%
	Female	64	50.4%
Class Taught	KG 1	64	50.4%
	KG 2	63	49.6%
Age Range of Teacher	16 – 20	11	8.7%
	21 – 25	26	20.5%
	26 – 29	33	26.0%
	30 – 35	31	24.4%
	36 and above	26	20.5%
Highest Qualification	MPhil	10	7.9%
	M.Ed	15	11.8%
	Dip. Ed	25	19.7%
	B.Ed	48	37.8%
	Cert.	22	17.3%
	Other (specify)	7	5.5%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The demographic data collected from 127 early childhood teachers provides insight into their background characteristics, including gender, class taught, age, and academic qualifications. These characteristics play a critical role in shaping the teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and ability to deliver quality early childhood education. The demographic information serves as a foundation for understanding the broader context of the study and for making informed interpretations of the findings.

The gender distribution of the respondents shows a near-equal representation of male and female teachers. Specifically, 63 of the teachers were male, representing 49.6% of the total, while 64 were female, accounting for 50.4%. This indicates that both genders are actively participating in the teaching profession at the early childhood level. The almost equal proportion is a significant observation because early childhood education has historically been female-dominated. According to Sumsion (2005), the low number of male teachers in early childhood education has often been attributed to gender stereotypes and societal

expectations. However, the findings of this study suggest a positive shift in gender representation, where both men and women are now contributing equally to the development of young children.

The involvement of male teachers in early childhood settings is beneficial for promoting gender balance and providing diverse role models for learners. Peeters (2007) emphasizes that children benefit from seeing both male and female figures in caring and teaching roles. This balance also helps challenge traditional beliefs that caregiving is only a woman's responsibility. In addition, Cameron, Moss, and Owen (1999) highlight the importance of male participation in improving the image of early childhood education as a professional and respectable career choice for all genders. Therefore, the gender balance among the respondents in this study represents an encouraging trend that supports inclusive teaching environments.

With regard to the class levels taught, the findings indicate an even distribution between Kindergarten 1 (KG1) and Kindergarten 2 (KG2). The data shows that 64 teachers were teaching KG1, representing 50.4% of the sample, while 63 teachers were handling KG2, representing 49.6%. This equal distribution ensures that the study captures the perspectives and experiences of teachers from both levels of kindergarten. Essa (2019) explains that both KG1 and KG2 are critical in laying the foundation for children's holistic development. Teachers at these levels are responsible for nurturing early literacy, numeracy, communication, and social skills. The balanced representation in this study means that the challenges, successes, and classroom practices reported are likely to be representative of the entire kindergarten stage.

The age distribution of the respondents reveals a diverse group of teachers in terms of age and potentially, years of teaching experience. The data shows that 11 teachers (8.7%) were aged between 16 and 20 years, 26 teachers (20.5%) were aged between 21 and 25 years, 33 teachers (26.0%) were aged between 26 and 29 years, 31 teachers (24.4%) were aged between 30 and 35 years, and 26 teachers (20.5%) were aged 36 years and above. The majority of the teachers fall within the age range of 21 to 35 years, making up 70.9% of the total sample. This indicates that many of the teachers are relatively young.

Young teachers are often dynamic, enthusiastic, and more adaptable to modern educational approaches. According to Vidal Rodeiro (2020), younger teachers tend to be more receptive to innovations in teaching methods, including the use of technology and inclusive practices. Their recent training may also equip them with updated knowledge on child development and teaching strategies. At the same time, the presence of teachers aged 36 years and above, who make up over one-fifth of the sample, adds value in terms of experience and maturity. Day and Gu (2007) argue that experienced teachers often possess strong classroom management skills and a deeper understanding of learner behavior.

The diversity in age presents opportunities for collaboration and mentoring within schools. Older teachers can share their experiences and practical wisdom with their younger colleagues, while younger teachers can introduce creative and innovative approaches to teaching. This mixture of experience and energy can enhance teaching and learning in early childhood centers.

The academic qualification of teachers plays a major role in determining their competence, confidence, and effectiveness in the classroom. The data reveals that 10(7.9%) held a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree, 15 teachers (11.8%) held a Master of Education (M.Ed) degree, 48 teachers (37.8%) held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, 25(19.7%) held a Diploma in Education, 22 teachers (17.3%) had a Certificate qualification, and 7 teachers (5.5%) reported having other qualifications not specified.

The highest number of teachers in the study, 48 (37.8%), had a Bachelor of Education qualification. This reflects a strong foundation of professional training among early childhood teachers. The B.Ed degree is designed to equip teachers with knowledge in pedagogy, curriculum design, and classroom management, making them well-prepared to teach at the early childhood level. According to the Ministry of Education Ghana (2018), the B.Ed has become the minimum qualification for teaching in pre-tertiary institutions, including kindergartens.

The presence of 25 diploma holders (19.7%) and 22 certificate holders (17.3%) suggests that a significant number of teachers may not yet have attained the standard qualification. Teachers with certificate and

diploma qualifications may have some foundational training in education but could benefit from upgrading to enhance their skills and effectiveness. Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor, and Westbrook (2013) argue that teachers with limited training often face challenges in adapting to curriculum changes and implementing learner-centered practices.

It is also encouraging to note that 25 teachers (19.7%) have obtained postgraduate qualifications (M.Ed or MPhil). These advanced qualifications demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and professional development. Teachers with master's degrees are likely to have a deeper understanding of educational research, leadership, and specialized teaching strategies. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) explain that professional development plays a key role in improving teacher quality and student outcomes. These highly qualified teachers can also serve as mentors or curriculum leaders in their schools.

The 7 respondents who indicated having "other" qualifications might possess certificates from non-teaching disciplines or international programs. It is important for school administrators to verify these qualifications and ensure that they meet national teaching standards. Where necessary, additional training should be provided to align these teachers with the national curriculum and best practices in early childhood education.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents suggest that the early childhood teaching workforce is becoming more diverse, inclusive, and qualified. The balanced gender representation is a positive sign of inclusive recruitment practices. The even distribution between KG1 and KG2 teachers ensures that the study's findings reflect experiences from all levels of early childhood education. The presence of both young and experienced teachers provides opportunities for professional growth through collaboration. Furthermore, the academic qualifications of the teachers show that most of them are professionally trained, although some still require further training and upgrading.

These findings have several implications for policy and practice. First, there is a need to strengthen in-service training and professional development programs for early childhood teachers, especially those with

certificate or diploma qualifications. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs should be accessible, relevant, and practical to help teachers upgrade their skills (UNESCO, 2015). Second, schools and education authorities should take advantage of the diverse age range among teachers to promote mentorship, team teaching, and knowledge sharing. Experienced teachers can guide younger ones in areas such as classroom management and dealing with diverse learners. Third, the gender balance observed in the study should be maintained through continued efforts to make early childhood teaching attractive and rewarding for both men and women. Inclusive teaching environments promote respect, empathy, and equality among learners.

Additionally, teachers with postgraduate degrees should be given leadership responsibilities such as leading professional learning communities or designing school-based training sessions. Recognizing their qualifications and expertise motivates them and helps improve the school's overall teaching quality. Finally, teacher placement and promotion should be based on both academic qualification and teaching experience. This ensures that learners are taught by qualified and competent educators who understand their developmental needs.

In conclusion, the interpretation and discussion of the demographic data provide a detailed picture of the early childhood teaching workforce involved in the study. The respondents represent a healthy mix of gender, age, class level, and academic qualifications. This diversity, if supported through appropriate training and collaboration, can contribute positively to the quality of early childhood education. The findings suggest that most teachers are equipped to meet the demands of the curriculum and support the learning needs of young children. However, targeted efforts are needed to support teachers who still require professional upgrading. Strengthening teacher education and support systems will help Ghana achieve its goal of providing quality and inclusive education for all young learners.

4.2 Analysis Research Questions

Research question 1: What factors influence early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District to adopt or reject play-based teaching methods?

Table 2: Factors that Influence Early Childhood Teachers

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
I use play-based teaching because it keeps children actively engaged.	60 (47%)	45 (35%)	15 (12%)	7 (6%)	4.24	0.85
My academic training has equipped me with the knowledge to use play in teaching.	48 (38%)	50 (39%)	20 (16%)	9 (7%)	4.08	0.93
I avoid play-based teaching due to lack of familiarity with its techniques.	15 (12%)	22 (17%)	50 (39%)	40 (32%)	3.01	1.03
I feel more confident when using traditional methods than play-based methods.	30 (24%)	35 (28%)	37 (29%)	25 (20%)	3.32	1.07
Parental pressure influences my decision not to focus on play in the classroom.	10 (8%)	30 (24%)	45 (35%)	42 (33%)	2.93	0.99
The school curriculum encourages the use of play-based strategies.	40 (31%)	55 (43%)	20 (16%)	12 (9%)	3.96	0.89
I adopt play-based learning when I have adequate support from school leaders.	45 (35%)	50 (39%)	20 (16%)	12 (9%)	4.00	0.91
Cultural beliefs about education influence my use of play in teaching.	20 (16%)	32 (25%)	40 (31%)	35 (28%)	3.04	1.08
I use more play-based teaching when I have sufficient teaching materials.	52 (41%)	46 (36%)	20 (16%)	9 (7%)	4.11	0.89
I find play-based teaching effective in achieving learning outcomes.	58 (46%)	45 (35%)	15 (12%)	9 (7%)	4.19	0.88

Source: Field Data, 2025

The analysis of teachers' responses on the use of play-based teaching strategies reveals insightful perspectives on their attitudes, knowledge, and experiences regarding this approach in early childhood education. The data shows that a majority of teachers find play-based teaching to be an effective method for engaging learners. Specifically, 47% of the respondents strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they use play-based teaching because it keeps children actively engaged, giving

a high mean score of 4.24 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.85. This suggests that teachers recognize the engaging nature of play in facilitating active learning among young children, consistent with literature that supports play as a means of promoting cognitive and social development in early learners (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Moreover, a good number of teachers reported that their academic training has equipped them with the knowledge needed to use play in their teaching. In this case, 38% of the teachers strongly agreed and 39% agreed with the statement, while only 16% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 4.08 and SD of 0.93 shows that most teachers feel adequately prepared to implement play-based teaching methods, indicating a relatively high level of confidence and training. This supports the views of O'Connor and Angus (2021), who assert that pre-service and in-service teacher training plays a critical role in the adoption of child-centered teaching strategies such as play.

However, not all teachers were confident in implementing play-based strategies. When asked if they avoid play-based teaching due to a lack of familiarity with its techniques, 12% strongly agreed and 17% agreed, while 39% disagreed and 32% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.01 and SD of 1.03 reflects a divided perception, but generally suggests that although some teachers may lack confidence, the majority are fairly familiar with the techniques involved. This finding aligns with the challenges highlighted by Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008), who argue that the integration of play in formal teaching requires not only training but continuous support to build competence and confidence.

In terms of confidence levels in relation to traditional methods versus play-based methods, 24% of teachers strongly agreed and 28% agreed that they feel more confident using traditional teaching

methods. Meanwhile, 29% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.32 and SD of 1.07 shows that while a significant number still prefer traditional approaches, there is an almost equal number of teachers who are open to using more innovative and playful methods. This trend supports observations made by Van Oers (2013), who noted that although traditional methods offer structure, play-based approaches are increasingly gaining acceptance due to their positive impact on learner engagement and creativity.

Regarding external influences, teachers were asked if parental pressure influenced their decision not to focus on play in the classroom. Only 8% strongly agreed and 24% agreed, while 35% disagreed and 33% strongly disagreed. The low mean of 2.93 and SD of 0.99 indicates that parental pressure is not a major barrier to play-based teaching in most cases. However, it still affects a minority of teachers, which highlights the importance of educating parents on the benefits of play-based learning to avoid misconceptions (Lynch, 2015).

The role of curriculum was also highlighted, with 31% of teachers strongly agreeing and 43% agreeing that the school curriculum encourages the use of play-based strategies. Only a small percentage disagreed (16%) or strongly disagreed (9%), resulting in a mean of 3.96 and SD of 0.89. This indicates that most teachers feel that play-based learning is supported within their curricular framework. This supports the Ghana Education Service's (GES) revised curriculum which emphasizes activity-based and child-centered learning in early childhood education (GES, 2019).

In terms of administrative support, 35% of teachers strongly agreed and 39% agreed that they adopt play-based learning when they have adequate support from school leaders. Only 16% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed. With a mean of 4.00 and SD of 0.91, it is clear that school

leadership support significantly affects the implementation of play-based teaching. This confirms findings from Ackah-Jnr and Fluckiger (2021), who argued that leadership support, including provision of materials, training, and encouragement, influences how effectively teachers integrate play in classrooms.

When asked whether cultural beliefs about education influence their use of play in teaching, only 16% strongly agreed and 25% agreed. However, a relatively higher percentage of teachers (31%) disagreed and 28% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.04 and SD of 1.08 reveals mixed views. While some teachers may still be influenced by cultural perceptions that see play as unserious or unproductive, the majority appear to be moving beyond such beliefs. This aligns with Bodrova and Leong (2015), who emphasize the need to shift cultural perspectives and promote understanding of the educational value of play, especially in African contexts where play is often seen as unrelated to academic success.

Another important aspect of play-based teaching is the availability of teaching materials. A significant number of teachers (41% strongly agreed and 36% agreed) stated that they use more play-based teaching when they have sufficient materials. Only a small number disagreed (16%) or strongly disagreed (7%). The high mean of 4.11 and SD of 0.89 indicates that resource availability is a key enabler of play-based learning. This supports findings by Saracho and Spodek (2006), who note that without adequate resources such as toys, games, and manipulatives, the effectiveness of play in learning is limited.

Finally, teachers were asked if they found play-based teaching effective in achieving learning outcomes. A strong 46% strongly agreed and 35% agreed, while only 12% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.19 and SD of 0.88 clearly shows that most teachers view play-

based teaching as beneficial to learning. This echoes the findings of Weisberg et al. (2016), who argue that play, especially guided play, enhances children's academic and social learning outcomes through exploration, creativity, and critical thinking.

In summary, the findings show that early childhood teachers generally have positive attitudes towards play-based teaching. Many of them are confident in using it due to their academic training, curriculum support, and leadership encouragement. However, some barriers remain, such as limited materials, lack of experience, and to a lesser extent, cultural and parental influences. These results indicate the need for continued investment in teacher professional development, provision of materials, and stakeholder education to promote the widespread adoption of play-based learning approaches. By creating an enabling environment that supports the integration of play into teaching, educators can provide a more holistic, engaging, and effective learning experience for young children (Whitebread et al., 2012).

Research question 2: What challenges do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District face when implementing play-based teaching?

Table 3: Challenges Teachers Face when Implementing Play-Based Teaching

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
My class size is too large for me to use play-based methods effectively.	55 (43%)	40 (31%)	20 (16%)	12 (9%)	4.09	0.95
I lack enough teaching and learning resources for play-based lessons.	60 (47%)	42 (33%)	15 (12%)	10 (8%)	4.18	0.91
I have limited time in the school timetable to conduct play activities.	48 (38%)	45 (35%)	20 (16%)	14 (11%)	4.00	0.98
There is no dedicated space in the classroom for play-based activities.	42 (33%)	50 (39%)	22 (17%)	13 (10%)	3.95	0.93
I find it difficult to balance academic goals and play-based learning.	30 (24%)	40 (31%)	37 (29%)	20 (16%)	3.44	1.09
I receive little or no support from school leadership to implement play-based teaching.	35 (28%)	38 (30%)	35 (28%)	19 (15%)	3.49	1.08
I feel unprepared to manage children during active play sessions.	20 (16%)	30 (24%)	45 (35%)	32 (25%)	3.03	1.08
There is a lack of clear guidelines on how to integrate play into the curriculum.	28 (22%)	40 (31%)	38 (30%)	21 (17%)	3.28	1.06
I have challenges assessing children's learning during play activities.	25 (20%)	38 (30%)	42 (33%)	22 (17%)	3.22	1.04
Teachers in my school rarely collaborate to plan play-based lessons.	30 (24%)	35 (28%)	40 (31%)	22 (17%)	3.30	1.06

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings from the analysis revealed that many teachers consider large class sizes as a major challenge to using play-based teaching methods effectively. This was indicated by a high mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.95), suggesting that most participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. This aligns with the view of Araujo et al. (2016), who argued that overcrowded classrooms reduce the chances for individual attention and free movement—conditions necessary for play-based learning to occur successfully.

A large number of teachers also agreed that they lack adequate teaching and learning materials to support play-based instruction. The mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.91) is one of the highest in the data set, showing that this is a widely experienced barrier. According to Isenberg and Jalongo (2018), the availability of age-

appropriate resources such as toys, puzzles, and blocks enhances the quality and impact of play-based instruction.

Furthermore, teachers reported that limited time in the school timetable affects their ability to conduct play activities. This concern scored a mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.98), indicating that time constraints are a significant issue. This supports the findings of Pyle and Danniels (2017), who found that rigid curriculum schedules can hinder the flexibility needed for meaningful play sessions.

The absence of dedicated space for play activities was another challenge reported by teachers, with a mean score of 3.95 (SD = 0.93). This confirms the argument by Wood (2014) that a flexible, well-designed classroom layout supports active engagement and exploration, which are key elements in play-based education.

Balancing academic goals with play-based learning appeared moderately challenging to teachers, reflected by a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 1.09). This suggests that while some teachers recognize the educational value of play, others struggle to connect it with academic content. According to Edwards (2017), integrating play with learning objectives requires proper training and a shift in mindset among educators.

Support from school leadership also appeared to be limited, with teachers reporting a mean score of 3.49 (SD = 1.08). This implies that many teachers feel unsupported in implementing play-based learning. As Ginsburg (2007) notes, administrative support is essential in creating a play-friendly school environment, including policies, resources, and professional development.

Teachers also expressed feeling unprepared to manage children during active play sessions, which had a mean score of 3.03 (SD = 1.08). This suggests a moderate level of concern and highlights a training gap in classroom management for active learning situations. This is consistent with the findings of Walsh et al. (2010), who emphasize the need for specialized training in managing play-based instruction environments.

The lack of clear guidelines for integrating play into the curriculum was another commonly reported issue, with a mean score of 3.28 (SD = 1.06). This shows that teachers may not have enough structure or clarity

to confidently use play as a method of instruction. According to OECD (2017), well-defined curricular frameworks are needed to help teachers embed play meaningfully into learning.

Assessing children's learning during play also emerged as a concern, with a mean score of 3.22 (SD = 1.04). This indicates that teachers find it difficult to track and document learning outcomes through play. Research by McInnes et al. (2013) confirms that many educators face challenges in creating reliable and valid assessment tools for play-based activities.

Lastly, the findings showed that collaboration among teachers to plan play-based lessons is not common. The mean score of 3.30 (SD = 1.06) shows moderate agreement with this concern. Collaboration is essential, as emphasized by Fleer (2011), who stated that peer support enhances innovation and shared understanding in early childhood instruction.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that although many teachers recognize the value of play-based learning, several challenges hinder its implementation in classrooms. These include large class sizes, lack of materials and space, time constraints, limited support, and unclear assessment strategies. Addressing these issues through professional development, curriculum reform, and school leadership support could enhance the use of play-based strategies in early childhood education (UNESCO, 2019).

Research question 3: What forms of support do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District need to implement play-based teaching effectively?

Table 4: Forms of Support Teachers Need to Implement Play-Based Teaching Effectively

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
I need regular workshops focused on play-based teaching methods.	62 (49%)	45 (35%)	15 (12%)	5 (4%)	4.29	0.82
More play materials and resources would help me implement play-based teaching.	65 (51%)	42 (33%)	12 (9%)	8 (6%)	4.30	0.87
I would benefit from mentorship or coaching in using play in teaching.	58 (46%)	46 (36%)	15 (12%)	8 (6%)	4.22	0.88
I need more planning time to incorporate play activities into my lessons.	55 (43%)	48 (38%)	16 (13%)	8 (6%)	4.18	0.87
My school needs to create more child-friendly spaces for play.	60 (47%)	45 (35%)	14 (11%)	8 (6%)	4.24	0.86
Collaboration with colleagues would help me improve my use of play in teaching.	50 (39%)	52 (41%)	17 (13%)	8 (6%)	4.14	0.85
I need administrative support to manage challenges in play-based learning.	54 (43%)	50 (39%)	15 (12%)	8 (6%)	4.19	0.85
The district office should provide clear policy guidelines for play-based learning.	58 (46%)	45 (35%)	16 (13%)	8 (6%)	4.21	0.88
I would be more confident using play if I had more practical examples or demonstrations.	60 (47%)	44 (35%)	15 (12%)	8 (6%)	4.24	0.86
I need support in assessing learning outcomes from play-based activities.	52 (41%)	46 (36%)	20 (16%)	9 (7%)	4.11	0.91

Source: Field Data, 2025

Based on the responses from early childhood teachers, it is evident that they strongly expressed the need for additional support and resources to effectively implement play-based teaching methods. A significant proportion of respondents (49%) strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they need regular workshops focused on play-based teaching methods, indicating a strong demand for professional development in this area. Similarly, 51% strongly agreed and 33% agreed that having more play materials and resources would enhance their ability to implement play-based teaching, with a high mean score of 4.30 and a relatively low standard deviation (SD = 0.87), suggesting strong consensus among teachers on this matter.

The data also show that many teachers (46% strongly agreed and 36% agreed) believed they would benefit from mentorship or coaching in the use of play in teaching, yielding a mean of 4.22. This highlights the need for continuous guidance and peer learning to develop their competencies in using play effectively. Additionally, 43% strongly agreed and 38% agreed that they need more planning time to incorporate play into their lessons, with a mean score of 4.18, suggesting that time constraints remain a barrier to play integration.

Moreover, 47% of teachers strongly agreed and 35% agreed that schools should create more child-friendly play spaces, reinforcing the need for supportive infrastructure to enhance children's play experiences. Similarly, a majority of teachers (39% strongly agreed and 41% agreed) believed that collaboration with colleagues would improve their play-based teaching practices, highlighting the importance of teamwork in pedagogical improvement.

Administrative and policy-level support was also noted as critical. About 43% strongly agreed and 39% agreed that they need administrative support to manage challenges associated with play-based learning, while 46% strongly agreed and 35% agreed that the district office should provide clear policy guidelines to guide play-based learning. These responses indicate that systemic support is essential for effective implementation.

Confidence and assessment were also discussed. A total of 47% strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they would feel more confident using play if they had access to practical examples or demonstrations, suggesting that model lessons or teaching aids can boost teacher competence. Lastly, 41% strongly agreed and 36% agreed that they need support in assessing learning outcomes from play activities, indicating a demand for practical assessment strategies aligned with play-based instruction (Fleer, 2011; NAEYC, 2020).

In summary, the findings clearly indicate that teachers require a comprehensive support system, including training, mentorship, collaboration opportunities, sufficient materials, administrative support, and policy guidance to effectively adopt and sustain play-based pedagogies in early childhood settings. These needs

reflect global calls for equipping educators with the tools, time, and training to promote active and meaningful learning through play (UNICEF, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

The purpose of this final chapter therefore, was to review the research process in relation to the research objectives and questions, in order to present a summary of the research findings, and draw conclusions, followed by recommendations which will be based on the findings of the study.

5.1 Summary of Finding

The major findings of the study were based on the study research questions.

The study revealed that early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District adopt or reject play-based teaching methods based on their beliefs, level of training, and understanding of play's educational value: Teachers who had been exposed to formal training or workshops on play-based learning were more inclined to use play as a teaching strategy, while those without such background relied on traditional, teacher-centered approaches.

The study revealed that early childhood teachers face significant challenges in implementing play-based teaching, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of instructional time: Many teachers reported that they do not have enough teaching and learning materials such as toys, manipulative, or outdoor play equipment to engage learners in meaningful play.

The study revealed that teachers need targeted support in the form of training, resources, and policy direction to implement play-based teaching effectively: Teachers expressed a strong desire for regular in-service training focused on practical play-based strategies, especially using locally available materials.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District adopt or reject play-based teaching methods based on several key factors. These include the availability of teaching and learning

resources, the teacher's personal understanding and beliefs about play-based learning, curriculum demands, and the level of support from school leadership. Teachers who appreciated the value of play in children's cognitive, emotional, and social development were more likely to integrate play-based methods into their teaching. This finding is consistent with Weisberg et al. (2016), who emphasized that teachers' beliefs and institutional support greatly influence the implementation of play-based pedagogies in early childhood education.

It was also concluded that early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District face numerous challenges in implementing play-based teaching. These include a lack of appropriate materials and resources, overcrowded classrooms, time constraints due to curriculum pressure, limited classroom space, and a lack of training in using play as an educational strategy. These challenges hinder the smooth integration of play into classroom activities and reduce the quality of child-centered learning. As noted by Pyle and Danniels (2017), successful implementation of play-based learning requires a supportive environment, adequate resources, and knowledgeable teachers who can effectively guide children's play to achieve learning goals.

Furthermore, the study concludes that teachers in the Kumbungu District are in need of various forms of support to implement play-based teaching effectively. These include regular professional development opportunities, provision of adequate teaching materials, peer collaboration, and ongoing mentoring by trained experts. Teachers also expressed the need for clear policy guidelines on how to integrate play into formal curriculum activities. This aligns with the findings of Fleer (2011), who stressed that continuous support and policy alignment are essential to sustain meaningful play-based learning in early childhood settings.

5.3 Recommendations

1. The study recommended that the Education Directorate, in collaboration with the Kumbungu District Assembly, should organize regular in-service training and professional development workshops focused on the effective use of play-based teaching strategies in early childhood education. These workshops should be practical and tailored to equip teachers with the knowledge

and skills necessary to plan, facilitate, and assess learning through play, while aligning with the curriculum goals and developmental needs of young learners.

2. It was further recommended that the Education Directorate, in partnership with the Kumbungu District Assembly, should ensure that all early childhood classrooms are adequately resourced with play-based teaching and learning materials such as educational toys, role-play kits, puzzles, building blocks, and outdoor play equipment. The provision of these resources will enable teachers to implement a wide range of interactive and child-centered learning activities that promote creativity, critical thinking, and holistic development.
3. The study also recommended that the Education Directorate, in collaboration with the Kumbungu District Assembly, should put measures in place to reduce overcrowding in early childhood classrooms. Large class sizes pose a significant challenge to the successful implementation of play-based learning. Reducing the pupil-teacher ratio will enhance classroom management, allow for more individualized learning experiences, and enable teachers to effectively engage learners in meaningful play activities.
4. Lastly, the study recommended that the Education Directorate, together with the Kumbungu District Assembly, should introduce a system of ongoing support and mentorship for early childhood teachers implementing play-based teaching. This could include classroom observations, peer coaching, and feedback sessions aimed at strengthening instructional practices and addressing implementation challenges. Such mentoring programs will foster teacher confidence, promote professional growth, and enhance the overall quality of play-based instruction in the district.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study's limitations include its geographical focus on early childhood centers in Kumbungu District, which restricted the generalizability of findings to other district or educational contexts. The reliance on self-reported data from parents and educators introduced bias, as

participants may provide socially desirable responses. Additionally, the descriptive survey Design, while offering depth and clarity, limits the ability to capture ongoing dynamics or seasonal variations.

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APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

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

Questionnaire on kindergarten teachers' perspectives of early childhood teachers on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District.

Introduction

Dear Participants, I am very grateful to you for your acceptance to participate in this study. The study is to investigate the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the Kumbungu District. It is expected that the results of this study will be beneficial to you and all KG teachers. This will help you to reflect on your instructional practices. Also, to find out whether such practices will help achieve the set goals and objectives of the national KG curriculum.

Your contributions and responses will be treated very strictly and confidential. For that matter, no name is requested during this exercise.

Thank you so much.

Instruction

Kindly provide responses for these questions as sincere as you can for the purpose of this study.

Section A

Personal Information: Demographics

Please, supply the responses as demand by the question.

1. School ID: _____
2. Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]
3. Class taught: KG 1 [ ] KG 2 [ ]
4. Age range of teacher: 16-20 [ ] 21-25 [ ] 26-29 [ ]
   30-35 [ ] 36 and above [ ]
5. What is your highest academic qualification?

MPhil [ ] M. Ed [ ] Dip. Ed [ ]

B. Ed [ ] Cert.[ ] Any other please specify_____

Research question 1: What factors influence early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District to adopt or reject play-based teaching methods?

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
I use play-based teaching because it keeps children actively engaged.					
My academic training has equipped me with the knowledge to use play in teaching.					
I avoid play-based teaching due to lack of familiarity with its techniques.					
I feel more confident when using traditional methods than play-based methods.					
Parental pressure influences my decision not to focus on play in the classroom.					
The school curriculum encourages the use of play-based strategies.					
I adopt play-based learning when I have adequate support from school leaders.					
Cultural beliefs about education influence my use of play in teaching.					
I use more play-based teaching when I have sufficient teaching materials.					
I find play-based teaching effective in achieving learning outcomes.					

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
My class size is too large for me to use play-based methods effectively.					
I lack enough teaching and learning resources for play-based lessons.					
I have limited time in the school timetable to conduct play activities.					
There is no dedicated space in the classroom for play-based activities.					
I find it difficult to balance academic goals and play-based learning.					
I receive little or no support from school leadership to implement play-based teaching.					
I feel unprepared to manage children during active play sessions.					
There is a lack of clear guidelines on how to integrate play into the curriculum.					
I have challenges assessing children's learning during play activities.					
Teachers in my school rarely collaborate to plan play-based lessons.					

Research question 2: What challenges do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District face when implementing play-based teaching?

Research question 3: What forms of support do early childhood teachers in the Kumbungu District need to implement play-based teaching effectively?

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
I need regular workshops focused on play-based teaching methods.					
More play materials and resources would help me implement play-based teaching.					
I would benefit from mentorship or coaching in using play in teaching.					
I need more planning time to incorporate play activities into my lessons.					
My school needs to create more child-friendly spaces for play.					
Collaboration with colleagues would help me improve my use of play in teaching.					
I need administrative support to manage challenges in play-based learning.					
The district office should provide clear policy guidelines for play-based learning.					
I would be more confident using play if I had more practical examples or demonstrations.					
I need support in assessing learning outcomes from play-based activities.					