

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**TEACHERS' USE OF PLAY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES  
IN KINDERGARTEN CENTRES IN THE HO WEST DISTRICT**



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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
the degree of Master of Philosophy  
(Early Childhood Education)**

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

**JUNE, 2025**

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## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

I, Sitsofe Melody Ameyya, declare that this dissertation 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.

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. Salome Praise Otami

Signature: .....

Date: .....

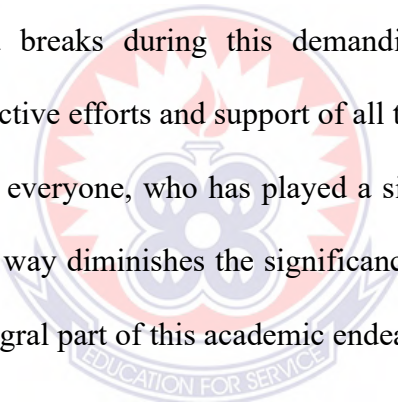
## **DEDICATION**

To my lovely Family



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following individuals whose unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout the journey of completing this thesis. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Salome Praise Otami for her unwavering dedication and expertise. Her mentorship and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping the course of this research. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to members of my family for their endless encouragement, love, and understanding. Their belief in my abilities has been my greatest motivation. I want to acknowledge my friends and colleagues for their support, stimulating discussions, and for providing me with much-needed breaks during this demanding journey. This thesis is a culmination of the collective efforts and support of all those mentioned above. While I have endeavored to list everyone, who has played a significant role, any omission is unintentional and in no way diminishes the significance of your contributions. Thank you all for being an integral part of this academic endeavor.



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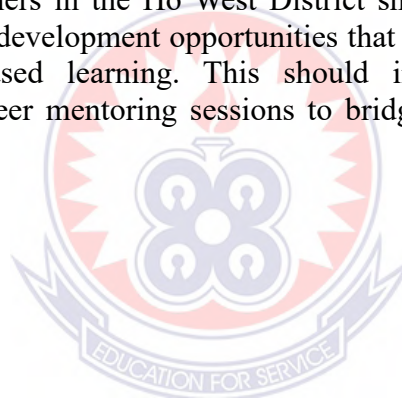
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District. The study adopted a mixed-method approach with the explanatory sequential research design. The total population for the study was 89 kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District. The census sampling was used to include all the 89 kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District, whereas the purposive sampling techniques were used to select nine (9) teachers from the same population. The instruments used for the collection of data were a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data were analysed descriptively (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations), whereas data from the interview were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers held positive perceptions of play-based pedagogy, valuing its role in cognitive, social, and emotional development. The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers viewed play as effective in enhancing learner engagement, achieving learning objectives, and supporting assessment. The study further revealed that kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District have foundational knowledge of play-based pedagogy but lacked sufficient practical training, continuous professional development, and systemic support. The study therefore recommended that kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District should be provided with regular, hands-on professional development opportunities that focus on practical strategies for implementing play-based learning. This should include workshops, classroom demonstrations, and peer mentoring sessions to bridge the gap between theory and practice.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Play has long been recognized as an essential component of early childhood education, with its value in promoting holistic development gaining increasing attention globally. International organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO continue to advocate for play-based approaches in early years education, asserting that play is not merely recreational but a vital medium for cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development in children (UNICEF, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Through play, young learners explore their environment, develop language, acquire problem-solving skills, and establish social relationships in ways that traditional instructional approaches may not fully facilitate.

Contemporary research supports the notion that integrating play into pedagogical practices enhances learners' engagement and improves learning outcomes. According to Pyle, DeLuca, and Danniels (2019), play-based learning offers a flexible, responsive framework that supports early learners' diverse developmental needs. They argue that the inclusion of guided and structured play in the curriculum fosters deeper learning while simultaneously respecting the natural modes through which children interact with their world. As educational systems increasingly shift towards learner-centered pedagogies, play has become a central component of early years curriculum reforms in many countries, including Ghana.

In Ghana, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service have acknowledged the critical role of play in the early years by embedding it into the national Kindergarten Curriculum. The curriculum promotes active, play-based

teaching methods aimed at nurturing curiosity, creativity, and foundational academic skills (NaCCA, 2019). However, the effectiveness of such policies relies heavily on the extent to which they are understood and implemented by classroom teachers. Teachers are not just transmitters of curriculum content; they are curriculum interpreters and enactors whose beliefs and practices directly influence how policies manifest in classroom settings (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2021).

Despite national recognition of play as a cornerstone of early childhood pedagogy, several factors influence its practical application. One critical area is the perception and attitudes of teachers toward play-based learning. Research by Kwarteng and Awuah (2021) found that while many early childhood teachers in Ghana value play, their conceptual understanding of play as a pedagogical tool often remains limited. Teachers' beliefs about the role of play in learning significantly shape their classroom practices, with those viewing it as educational being more likely to incorporate it into daily routines meaningfully. In contrast, others may perceive play as a break from academic work, thus relegating it to a lesser role.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of teachers' use of play in the classroom depends on how well they can integrate it into teaching and learning activities. Pyle and Alaca (2018) emphasize that for play to be effective in educational settings, it must be intentionally planned, aligned with learning objectives, and skillfully facilitated by teachers. Teachers must strike a balance between child-led free play and teacher-guided play to maximize educational value. However, in many Ghanaian kindergarten settings, especially in rural and underserved areas, there remains a tendency for play to be informal and disconnected from instructional goals. This disconnect reduces the

potential benefits of play-based pedagogy in facilitating academic and developmental progress.

Professional training plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' capacity to use play effectively. Several studies have pointed out the lack of adequate training among early childhood educators in play-based methodologies. According to Boateng (2020), many kindergarten teachers in Ghana enter the profession without sufficient exposure to the principles and practices of play-based teaching during their pre-service education. As a result, even when the curriculum emphasizes play, teachers may lack the confidence or know-how to implement it effectively in their classrooms. Ongoing in-service training and professional development are thus critical to equipping teachers with the skills and strategies needed to plan, execute, and assess play-based activities.

In addition to teacher attitudes and training, the successful implementation of play-based learning is often constrained by the availability of resources. Effective play requires access to a wide range of materials such as manipulatives, art supplies, role-play costumes, construction toys, and storybooks, which stimulate creativity and allow for varied forms of expression. However, in many public kindergarten centres in Ghana, particularly in rural districts such as Ho West, these resources are often inadequate or entirely absent. A study by Tamanja and Ankomah (2022) revealed that resource limitations significantly hinder the delivery of quality early childhood education in deprived communities. Without sufficient teaching and learning materials, the capacity of teachers to implement meaningful play-based learning is undermined, regardless of their attitudes or training.

The Ho West District, located in the Volta Region of Ghana, provides a relevant context for examining these issues. The district comprises a mix of rural and semi-urban communities where kindergarten education continues to develop in terms of infrastructure, teacher capacity, and pedagogical practices. Although access to early childhood education has expanded, the quality of classroom experiences varies, particularly in how play-based learning is supported and implemented. Persistent challenges related to teacher preparedness, availability of play materials, and curriculum enactment influence the extent to which play is meaningfully integrated into teaching and learning. Observations and anecdotal reports indicate notable variations in the use of play across kindergarten classrooms in the district, shaped by differences in teacher training, school resources, and levels of administrative support.

Within this context, the current study investigates kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District. Specifically, the study examines teachers' views toward play-based learning, assesses how effectively play is used to support instruction, explores the nature and adequacy of teachers' training in play pedagogy, and identifies the availability of teaching and learning resources that enable play-based approaches. Addressing these issues is essential for generating context-specific evidence to inform policy and practice aimed at strengthening the quality of early childhood education in the district and similar settings across Ghana.

Given the growing emphasis on play-based learning in global and national early childhood education discourse, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by situating the conversation within a local context. It addresses critical gaps in understanding how teachers in resource-constrained environments perceive and utilize play as a tool for learning and development. Furthermore, the study provides evidence

that can be used by educational stakeholders to design targeted interventions such as teacher training programs, resource mobilization efforts, and policy reforms to enhance the quality and effectiveness of kindergarten education in Ghana.

In conclusion, while the value of play in early childhood education is well-established, its actual application in classroom settings is influenced by a combination of teacher perceptions, pedagogical competence, and resource availability. In districts such as Ho West, understanding these dynamics is key to supporting the effective implementation of the national kindergarten curriculum and promoting meaningful learning experiences for young children. This study, therefore, offers a timely and necessary inquiry into the realities of play-based pedagogy at the grassroots level, with implications for national education planning and practice.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Play is globally recognised as a core component of effective early childhood education, functioning both as a natural mode of learning for children and as an intentional pedagogical strategy for teachers (UNESCO, 2022; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020). In line with international best practices, Ghana's kindergarten curriculum promotes play as central to achieving developmentally appropriate learning outcomes (NaCCA, 2019). Despite this policy orientation, the enactment of play in classroom practice remains uneven, particularly in rural districts such as Ho West in the Volta Region, where teaching practices often diverge from curriculum expectations and policy intentions.

Drawing on professional experience as an early childhood coordinator and in-service teacher trainer in the Ho West District, the researcher has been positioned to observe teaching and learning processes across multiple kindergarten centres. These

experiences, gained through structured monitoring visits, professional development workshops, and mentoring activities, revealed noticeable differences in how teachers interpret and use play during instruction. While these professional experiences do not constitute empirical evidence, they helped to identify recurring instructional patterns and informed the focus of the study, particularly regarding teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and classroom practices related to play.

A recurring issue observed during teacher engagements concerns the diverse perceptions teachers hold about the role of play in teaching and learning. Teachers' prior training backgrounds and instructional histories appear to influence whether play is viewed as a meaningful learning strategy or merely as recreational activity. In classrooms where play is perceived as non-instructional, teaching tends to be dominated by rigid, teacher-centred routines with limited opportunities for exploration and interaction. These observations align with research indicating that teachers' beliefs and attitudes significantly shape pedagogical decisions and classroom practices in early childhood settings (Pyle et al., 2021; Weisberg et al., 2022). Examining teachers' views toward play is therefore necessary to understand how perceptions translate into instructional behaviour.

Closely linked to teachers' views is the effectiveness with which play is used to support learning outcomes. Classroom observations frequently showed the use of songs, games, or materials without clear learning objectives, scaffolding strategies, or assessment intentions. This suggests that although play may be present, it is not always pedagogically purposeful. As Zosh et al. (2018) argue, play supports learning most effectively when it is intentionally guided, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with curricular goals. This highlights a methodological gap in existing studies,

which often describe the presence of play without systematically examining how it is planned, implemented, and assessed in classroom contexts.

A further concern relates to teachers' limited training and professional capacity in understanding and using play as a learning activity, as distinct from play-based pedagogy as an instructional approach. In many rural schools within the district, kindergarten classes are handled by teachers who lack specialised early childhood training or have had limited exposure to structured guidance on educational play. This conceptual gap between play and play-based pedagogy affects teachers' ability to differentiate instruction, manage play in large or mixed-ability classrooms, and connect play activities to learning outcomes. The lack of sustained professional development opportunities further compounds this challenge, pointing to a population gap in the literature, as rural kindergarten teachers are often underrepresented in empirical studies (Agbagbla, 2018; Dzamesi, 2020; Hunter, 2019; Tam, 2023).

Beyond teacher knowledge, the implementation of play is also shaped by the availability and use of teaching and learning resources. Many kindergarten classrooms in the Ho West District are poorly resourced, limiting opportunities for meaningful play. Although several studies acknowledge resource constraints, few examine how material availability interacts with teachers' beliefs and training to influence the educational use of play. This reflects a theoretical gap, as existing research rarely integrates teacher cognition, classroom resources, and contextual factors within a single analytical framework.

Contextually, while national studies on play-based learning exist in Ghana (Tatsi et al., 2024), there appear to be limited studies focusing specifically on rural districts such as Ho West, where contextual realities uniquely shape classroom practice. This

study therefore seeks to address these population, theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps by systematically examining teachers' perceptions, training, resources, and classroom practices related to play in early childhood education within the Ho West District.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate kindergarten teachers use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The following research objectives guided the study

1. Examine the views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District
2. Find out the training level of kindergarten teachers in the use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District.
3. To explore the teaching and learning resources available for the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District.
4. Assess the effectiveness of teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

Based on the stated research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District?

2. What level of training does kindergarten teachers possess in the use of play for teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District?
3. What teaching and learning resources are available to support the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?
4. How effective is the use of play by teachers in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study holds vital policy implications for early childhood education in the Ho West District and beyond. By examining teachers' views on the use of play in teaching and learning activities, the study would provide policymakers and curriculum developers with insights into the attitudes that shape the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Such insights can inform policy interventions that promote positive perceptions and attitudes among teachers toward play as a pedagogical tool. Also, findings from the study would help education authorities evaluate the current implementation of the play-based components of Ghana's early childhood curriculum, and identify areas that require support through supervision or policy refinement. Furthermore, the study would highlight professional development needs that may prompt revisions to teacher education programmes or initiate district-level in-service training plans. Finally, exploring the availability of teaching and learning resources would provide critical information to guide equitable resource distribution policies and the provision of age-appropriate materials that enable effective implementation of play in teaching and learning across public kindergarten centres.

At the practical level, this study would benefit kindergarten teachers and school administrators by offering a reflective lens on current practices related to play-based instruction. Findings from the study would enable practitioners to identify personal and institutional biases that may hinder or enhance the effective use of play in classrooms. Assessing the effectiveness of current play-based strategies would equip educators with evidence of best practices and limitations, helping them refine their teaching approaches to improve learner engagement and development. Moreover, insights into the availability and use of learning resources will help teachers and school leaders think creatively about utilizing existing materials or advocating for needed resources to implement playful and developmentally appropriate learning activities in their settings.

Theoretically, this study would contribute to the broader discourse on play-based learning by contextualizing established learning theories within the realities of Ghana's kindergarten education system. Exploring teachers' perceptions about play provides a window into their underlying belief systems and cognitive frameworks, contributing to research on teacher agency, pedagogical beliefs, and change. By assessing the effectiveness of play in classroom practices, the study also provides empirical support for child-centered theories such as Piaget's cognitive development theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, especially in how these models apply in resource-limited and culturally diverse settings. The analysis of teachers' training levels extends theoretical discussions on teacher preparedness and professional identity, while the exploration of learning materials aligns with ecological and systems theories that emphasize the role of the environment and tools in shaping teaching and learning processes.

### **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited in several key areas to ensure focused and manageable research. Geographically, the study is confined to kindergarten centres within the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. This delimitation allowed for an in-depth examination of play-based teaching practices within a specific local education context, but it may limit the generalizability of the findings to other districts or regions. In terms of content, the study was delimited to the four main variables: the views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play, the training levels of teachers regarding play pedagogy, the availability of teaching and learning resources to support play in instructional settings, and the effectiveness of play-based methods in teaching and learning. These focus areas were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing the implementation of play in early childhood education. Contextually, the study concentrates solely on public kindergarten centres, excluding private or international schools, to reflect the realities of public early childhood education provision in Ghana. Methodologically, the study is delimited to an explanatory sequential design, beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by qualitative data to explain or expand on the quantitative findings. This design was chosen to provide both a broad overview and deeper insight into the topic, but it excludes other possible research designs such as ethnographic or purely qualitative approaches.

### **1.8 Limitations**

The study was limited to a single district, and as such, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions in Ghana or beyond, where contextual variables such as infrastructure, cultural practices, teacher training levels, and administrative support may differ significantly. While efforts were made to ensure the clarity and reliability

of the instruments, some respondents did not provide complete answers to certain questionnaire items. This non-responsiveness may have introduced gaps in the data, potentially affecting the validity and completeness of the findings. Moreover, self-reported data can be influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may respond in a manner they perceive to be favorable or acceptable rather than reflecting their true practices or beliefs. Furthermore, the qualitative component involved only a small purposive sample of nine teachers. While these participants were carefully selected based on specific criteria, their perspectives did not capture the full range of experiences and challenges faced by all kindergarten teachers in the district.

### **1.9 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Play-Based Pedagogy:** In this study, play-based pedagogy refers specifically to the methods and practices used by kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District to integrate play into their daily teaching routines.

**Ho West District:** A district located in the Volta Region of Ghana, where the study is conducted.

**Kindergarten:** A programme for four to six-year-old children.

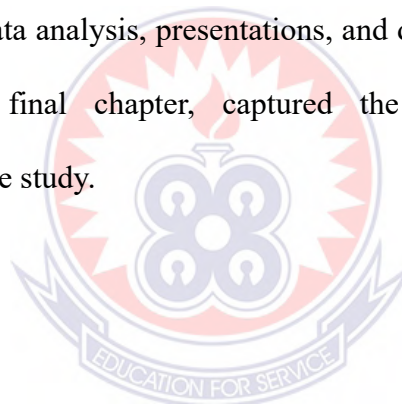
**Kindergarten Teachers:** Educators responsible for teaching children in kindergarten within the Ho West District.

**Implementation:** The process by which kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District adopt and apply play-based pedagogy.

**Play:** Engaging in activities that are enjoyable and spontaneous, often involving creativity and imagination.

### **1.10 Organization of the Study**

Chapter one provided a comprehensive overview of the research topic, outlining the background to the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations, limitations, operational definitions of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter two critically reviews relevant literature on play-based pedagogy, focusing on the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical reviews. Chapter three outlines the research methodology used for the study. It includes a detailed description of the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample, and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis. The fourth chapter captured the data analysis, presentations, and discussions of findings. Chapter five, which is the final chapter, captured the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Overview

This chapter focused on the review of related literature on the specific objectives of the study. The sources of literature included scholarly journal articles, both published and unpublished reports, books, and web articles. The following major areas were covered:

#### Theoretical Framework

- The sociocultural theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978)

#### Conceptual Framework

- Concept of Play
- Types of Play
- Benefits of play



#### Empirical Review

- Teachers' Views Towards the Use of Play-based Pedagogy
- Teacher Training and Teachers' Use of Play
- Teaching and Learning Resources Available to Teachers' Use of Play in Teaching and Learning
- Effectiveness of Teachers' Use of Play in Teaching and Learning

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

##### **Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978)**

The sociocultural theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the pivotal role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978)

proposed that learning occurs as children engage with more knowledgeable others such as parents, teachers, or peers within their social environments. Through this interaction, learners acquire cultural tools, including language, values, and problem-solving strategies, which shape their thinking and understanding of the world.

Central to the sociocultural theory is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which describes the range of tasks a child can perform with guidance but cannot yet accomplish independently. Vygotsky argued that effective learning happens when instructional support, known as scaffolding, is provided within the ZPD, enabling learners to gradually internalize skills and knowledge (Shabani et al., 2010). This dynamic process underscores the importance of tailoring educational experiences to the developmental needs of each learner.

Language plays a central role in Vygotsky's framework as both a cultural tool and a medium for thought development. Through dialogic interactions, children not only acquire knowledge but also learn how to structure their thinking. For example, inner speech, a form of self-directed dialogue, emerges from external communication and supports problem-solving and self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Cultural context is another key element of the sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that cognitive development is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical milieu of the learner. This perspective highlights the diversity of learning pathways and the importance of integrating culturally relevant practices into education.

The sociocultural theory has profound implications for teaching and learning. It advocates for collaborative, interactive, and contextually meaningful approaches, which have been shown to enhance student engagement and achievement (Daniels,

2016). By recognizing the interdependence of social, cultural, and individual factors, the theory offers a holistic framework for understanding how learners construct knowledge within their social worlds.

The sociocultural theory is highly relevant to the study of teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District. Rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), the theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and is shaped by cultural and contextual factors. Within this study, the sociocultural perspective provides a useful framework for understanding how play is utilized as a teaching and learning tool through interactions among teachers, learners, and the learning environment.

According to sociocultural theory, learning is mediated by social processes, cultural tools, and shared activities. Play, as a socially constructed activity, serves as a key medium through which children interact with peers, teachers, and learning materials. Teachers' use of play-based activities in kindergarten classrooms reflects culturally informed practices that support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Thus, the theory helps explain how play facilitates learning through guided participation and meaningful engagement.

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant to this study. In play-based learning, teachers provide guidance, support, and scaffolding to help children perform tasks they may not be able to accomplish independently. Through structured and guided play, teachers assist learners in moving from their current level of understanding to higher levels of competence (Vygotsky, 1978). This aligns with the study's focus on examining how teachers intentionally use play to support learning outcomes in kindergarten settings.

Furthermore, sociocultural theory highlights the role of language and interaction in learning. During play-based activities, dialogue between teachers and children enables the co-construction of knowledge, promotes problem-solving, and enhances understanding (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Teachers' verbal guidance, questioning, and feedback during play contribute significantly to the effectiveness of play as a learning strategy.

Finally, the cultural context of the Ho West District is central to this study. Sociocultural theory underscores that teaching and learning practices are embedded within specific cultural and social contexts. Exploring how local beliefs, traditions, and available resources influence teachers' use of play in kindergarten classrooms provides a deeper understanding of how play-based teaching is implemented in the district. This theoretical lens therefore supports a contextualized analysis of play as a pedagogical tool in early childhood education.

## **2.2 Concept of Play**

Play is a fundamental activity in childhood, recognized for its critical role in fostering cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. The concept of play has been extensively studied across disciplines, leading to diverse definitions, theories, and classifications. Broadly, play is characterized as a self-motivated, pleasurable activity that is often process-oriented and intrinsically driven (Sutton-Smith, 2001). It allows children to explore, experiment, and engage with their environment in ways that support holistic growth.

Play has been defined in various ways depending on theoretical perspectives. From a developmental psychology lens, Piaget (1962) viewed play as a means for children to consolidate learning, progressing from sensorimotor experiences to symbolic and

rule-based games. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the sociocultural aspect of play, describing it as a tool for learning through social interaction and cultural mediation. Both theorists underscore the importance of play in enabling children to construct meaning and develop higher-order cognitive skills.

Modern definitions of play highlight its voluntary nature, creativity, and capacity to foster imagination. Pellegrini and Smith (1998) emphasize the distinction between play and other activities by its lack of extrinsic goals, suggesting that children engage in play for its inherent enjoyment rather than to achieve external outcomes.

Numerous theories have been proposed to explain the purpose and value of play. Classical theories, such as surplus energy theory (Spencer, 1878) and recreation theory (Lazarus, 1883), posit that play serves as an outlet for excess energy or as a way to rejuvenate after work. Contemporary theories, however, place greater emphasis on developmental and learning aspects.

The psychoanalytic theory, advanced by Freud (1908), argues that play serves as a medium for emotional release and coping with anxieties. In contrast, the cognitive-developmental approach by Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) focuses on the role of play in cognitive and social development. For example, pretend play helps children understand abstract concepts, practice social roles, and develop problem-solving skills.

### **2.2.1 Historical Perspectives of Play**

Play has long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of childhood and an essential medium through which children make sense of the world. Historically, the perception and role of play have evolved across time, cultures, and pedagogical paradigms. From

ancient philosophies to modern educational frameworks, play has been understood both as a natural activity and a powerful educational tool that supports children's holistic development. This paper explores the historical trajectory of play in early childhood education, drawing from classical thought, pioneering educators, and contemporary pedagogical practices.

The earliest perspectives on play can be traced back to ancient civilizations. In ancient Greece, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle acknowledged the importance of play in child development. Plato emphasized that children's play should be meaningful and related to their future roles in society. In his work *The Laws*, Plato suggested that children's games should imitate the roles they are expected to perform in adulthood (Plato, trans. 1970). Similarly, Aristotle viewed play as necessary for physical and psychological well-being, asserting that recreation was essential for the development of virtue and balanced living (Aristotle, trans. 1999).

In Eastern traditions, Chinese and Indian philosophies also recognized play in children's lives, although it was often viewed through a moral or spiritual lens. Confucian teachings emphasized play as a means for instilling discipline and harmony, while Indian philosophical traditions saw storytelling and games as integral to moral development (Wood & Attfield, 2005).

During the Enlightenment, the perception of childhood began to shift. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were instrumental in reshaping educational philosophy. Locke (1693) proposed the idea of the child as a "tabula rasa" (blank slate) and believed that play could be used to reinforce desirable behavior and learning. Rousseau, on the other hand, emphasized natural development. In *Emile* (1762), he advocated for education that allowed children to explore and learn through

direct experience and free play, aligning learning with developmental readiness rather than rigid instruction.

This period marked a significant turn toward viewing children as active participants in their own learning. The idea that play could be used to nurture intrinsic motivation, rather than enforce discipline, laid the foundation for later child-centered approaches.

One of the most pivotal figures in the history of educational play was Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), the German educator who created the first kindergarten. Froebel believed that play was the highest expression of human development during early childhood and the most effective means through which children could engage with the world (Liebschner, 2001). He introduced structured play through “gifts” (toys) and “occupations” (hands-on activities), which helped children explore mathematical, aesthetic, and natural concepts in a developmental sequence (Tovey, 2013). For Froebel, play was both spontaneous and guided, allowing the child’s inner self to harmonize with the external world. His contribution marked the formal integration of play into early childhood curriculum.

Building on Froebel’s foundation, other educators in the late 19th and early 20th centuries continued to refine the role of play in education. Maria Montessori (1870–1952), for instance, viewed play as children’s “work.” While she did not emphasize play in the traditional sense, Montessori designed carefully prepared environments where children could engage in self-directed activities that promoted concentration, coordination, and independence (Montessori, 1967).

Rudolf Steiner, founder of the Waldorf education system, emphasized imaginative and unstructured play as a vehicle for creativity and spiritual development. Waldorf

classrooms integrated storytelling, art, and nature-based activities to allow children to engage with the world through their senses and imagination (Edwards, 2002).

During the progressive education movement in the early 20th century, John Dewey emphasized experiential learning. Dewey (1938) argued that play and learning were interconnected through activity and reflection. He believed that meaningful play experiences helped children internalize democratic values, problem-solving skills, and social cooperation.

By the mid-20th century, developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky deepened the understanding of play through cognitive and socio-cultural theories. Piaget (1962) categorized play into stages: sensorimotor, symbolic, and games with rules each aligning with cognitive development phases. He emphasized that play allowed children to assimilate experiences and build internal schemas.

Vygotsky (1978), however, emphasized the social nature of play, particularly “sociodramatic play,” where children act out roles and scenarios. He introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), suggesting that play allows children to perform beyond their current ability levels with support, thus promoting cognitive and language development.

Erik Erikson also saw play as central to emotional and social development. He believed that play enables children to work through internal conflicts and build a sense of autonomy and identity (Erikson, 1950).

In the 21st century, play continues to be recognized as an essential component of early childhood education. Frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) explicitly recognize play as a fundamental right.

Globally, early childhood curricula emphasize play-based learning as a means to develop not only academic skills but also creativity, resilience, and socio-emotional competence (Zosh et al., 2018).

However, with increased focus on academic accountability and standardized testing, there is growing concern that the role of play in education is diminishing. Contemporary scholars and educators advocate for a balanced approach that integrates guided, free, and purposeful play into structured learning environments (Broadhead, Howard, & Wood, 2010).

### **2.2.2 Types of Play**

Given the general difficulty with defining play, and the recognition of its complexity, it is not surprising that there have been numerous attempts to categorize different types of play. As Moyles (2014) has demonstrated, for every aspect of children's development, there is a form of play. However, in the contemporary psychological literature the various kinds of play are generally divided into five broad types based upon the developmental purposes which each serve, partly arising from the evolutionary analyses and how each relates to and supports children's learning. These types are commonly referred to as physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretence/ socio-dramatic play, and games with rules (Power, 2000). Although each type of play has a main developmental function or focus, arguably all of them support aspects of physical, intellectual, social-emotional, and creative growth. From all the available evidence, a balance of experience of each of these types of play is likely to be beneficial to children's development.

### 2.2.3 Physical Play

Physical play was the earliest to evolve and can be observed in some reptiles and amphibians and most, if not all, mammals (Burghardt, 2015). In human children, it includes active exercise play (e.g.: jumping, climbing, dancing, skipping, bike riding, and ball play), rough-and-tumble (with friends, siblings, or parents/guardians) and fine-motor practice (e.g.: sewing, coloring, cutting, junk modeling and manipulating action and construction toys). Physical play comprises exercise play and fine motor play.

Exercise play begins to emerge during the second year of life and typically occupies around 20% of children's behaviour by the age of four to five years. The evidence suggests that this type of play is related to children's developing whole body and hand-eye co-ordination, and is important in building strength and endurance (Visagie, 2015).

The most extensively researched aspect of physical play, however, is 'rough-and-tumble' play. It includes chasing, grappling, kicking, wrestling and rolling on the ground and appears to have evolved as a mechanism through which children learn to control aggression. It emerges slightly later than exercise play and is typical amongst early childhood learners. However, like most types of play, it continues to be enjoyed, usually between family members and close friends, right into adulthood. It is easily distinguishable from actual aggression by the evident enjoyment of the participants, and appears to be wholly beneficial. Tang (2021) suggests that it is clearly associated with the development of emotional and social skills and understandings. In human children, it is associated with the development of strong emotional bonds, or attachments, between children and their parents, and with school-aged children's

abilities to understand emotional expressions (Jarvis, 2022). A study by Gyeabour (2019) for example, looked at father-son rough-and-tumble behaviours that involved direct body contact in 157 suburban families in the United States and found that it related very strongly with three-year-old sons' social competence, as demonstrated in early childhood learners.

There is growing concern that children, largely as a result of the pressures associated with urban living, including the reduction of natural environments and increased safety concerns, are becoming over-supervised and have fewer opportunities to engage in 'risky' outdoor physical play. Such play is essential for supporting children's developing independence, resilience, problem-solving abilities, and self-regulation. Recognition of these concerns has driven increased advocacy for the provision of accessible outdoor play spaces for children in urban settings. Among early childhood practitioners, these issues have contributed to a renewed emphasis on outdoor play and a growing interest in Forest School approaches and outdoor learning models, particularly those developed in Scandinavian countries (Knight, 2018; Waite et al., 2021).

Fine-motor play refers to a broad range of activities that support young children's development of hand and finger coordination and control. These activities are often solitary in nature but can be effectively supported through adult guidance and interaction, such as sewing, drawing, threading, or construction tasks. Due to their engaging and repetitive qualities, fine-motor activities support the development of children's concentration, persistence, and self-regulation skills, which are foundational for later academic learning (Cameron et al., 2019).

#### **2.2.4 Play with Objects**

Children's learning and development through exploration of the physical environment and the objects within it are fundamental to holistic growth in early childhood. Object play begins in infancy when children are able to grasp and manipulate objects, engaging in exploratory behaviours such as mouthing, rotating, rubbing, banging, and dropping. This early form of play, commonly described as sensorimotor play, enables children to explore the properties, functions, and behaviours of materials (Yogman et al., 2018). Between eighteen and twenty-four months, toddlers begin arranging objects, which gradually develops into sorting and classifying activities. By around four years of age, children increasingly engage in building, making, and construction activities (Verdine et al., 2019).

Object play frequently incorporates other forms of play, blending physical, manipulative, and socio-dramatic elements. During construction and creative activities, children often generate narratives and stories that accompany their actions. Research consistently shows that object play plays a critical role in the development of cognitive and problem-solving skills. For example, Schmitt et al. (2018) found that playful exploration and construction activities in preschool-aged children were significant predictors of performance in spatial and problem-solving tasks. Object play is also associated with the use of private speech, where children talk aloud to guide their actions, sustain attention, and regulate behaviour.

These findings have informed recent studies that explore constructional play as a therapeutic intervention for children with difficulties in self-regulation, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). For instance, Lego-based therapy programmes have demonstrated positive

outcomes in reducing maladaptive behaviours and improving social interaction and self-regulation skills among participating children when compared with control groups receiving no structured intervention (Brett et al., 2020; Lindsay et al., 2021).

### **2.2.5 Symbolic Play**

Symbolic play is a play that supports the development of technical abilities to express and reflect upon child's experiences, ideas, and emotions (Delfin, & Wang, 2023). Humans are uniquely equipped to use a wide variety of symbolic systems including spoken language, reading, and writing, number, various visual media (painting, drawing, collage) music and so on. During the first five years of life, when children are actively developing foundational cognitive and linguistic systems, these aspects of learning are strongly embedded within their play experiences. Contemporary research emphasizes that play provides a natural and meaningful context for children to experiment with language and construct understanding during early development (Zosh et al., 2018; Whitebread et al., 2020).

Play with language begins in infancy, as children under one year of age engage in playful exploration of sounds through babbling, vocal experimentation, and imitation. As children grow older, this playful engagement increasingly focuses on the sounds, rhythms, and structures of the language or languages present in their environment. Language play is a highly active and creative process that evolves into inventing new words, experimenting with rhymes, alliteration, and sound patterns, and eventually expressing enjoyment in wordplay, puns, and jokes. A substantial body of recent research confirms that language play plays a critical role in supporting children's language development and, importantly, contributes to the development of phonological awareness. This, in turn, significantly influences the ease with which

young children acquire early literacy skills, including reading and writing (Neumann, Hood, & Ford, 2018; Pyle et al., 2021).

By integrating basic numeracy into meaningful, real-life contexts, play involving counting and other basic mathematical operations enhances young children's ability to confidently engage with formal mathematics (Clements & Sarama, 2019; Van Oers, 2018). Recent research supports Vygotsky's (1986) insight on the close relationship between early drawing and writing in young children's mark-making. For example, Matthews (2021) highlights that drawing is likely the earliest form of symbolic representation, and it remains an integral aspect of children's symbolic play. Studies on children's drawings have shown that through drawing, children expand their "graphic vocabularies" and organize graphic elements into coherent representations, effectively forming a "graphic grammar" (Kress & Selander, 2020; Rose, 2016). These studies suggest that children's visual literacy understanding pictures, diagrams, models, and maps benefits from exposure to various visual media during play.

Musical play, while under-researched, is a significant and universal form of play across cultures. From an early age, children naturally engage in singing, dancing, and sound exploration using both their bodies and objects. Research on early mother-infant pre-linguistic interactions, such as Moon's (2020) work, has emphasized the role of infants' innate responses to rhythm and sound in establishing early communicative abilities. A recent review of this area concludes that musical play, with its inherently social and interactive characteristics, promotes a wide range of developmental abilities, including social interaction, communication, emotional understanding, memory, self-regulation, and creativity (Hallam, 2017). Furthermore, in a study with 96 four-year-olds, Kirschner and Tomasello (2020) found that joint

music-making significantly increased subsequent cooperative and helpful behavior, compared to a control group that experienced similar social interaction but without music.

### **2.2.6 Pretence/Socio-Dramatic Play**

Pretend or socio-dramatic play is often described as a form of child-initiated or “free” play; however, it is governed by implicit social rules related to the roles and scenarios children adopt. During socio-dramatic play, children must adhere to the expectations and behaviours associated with the characters they portray, which places cognitive and social demands on their behaviour. Recent research continues to demonstrate a strong relationship between the complexity of socio-dramatic play and the development of social responsibility, cooperation, and perspective-taking in young children (Elias & Berk, 2018; Whitebread et al., 2020).

In contemporary, urbanised, and technologically advanced societies, pretend play remains one of the most common forms of play among young children, typically emerging toward the end of the first year of life. It is also one of the most extensively researched forms of play. High-quality pretend play has consistently been associated with positive outcomes in children’s cognitive, social, and academic development. Recent studies report that engagement in play worlds supports the development of narrative skills, language complexity, and symbolic thinking in early and middle childhood (Nicolopoulou et al., 2019; Weisberg et al., 2016). Other studies have linked pretend and socio-dramatic play to improvements in deductive reasoning, social competence, and enhanced self-regulation, particularly among children who display impulsive behaviours (Bodrova & Leong, 2018).

A growing body of research continues to support Vygotskian perspectives on the role of pretend play in fostering representational thinking and self-regulatory abilities. Socio-dramatic play frequently involves high levels of private speech, through which children guide their actions, plan scenarios, and regulate their emotions and behaviour (Alarcón-Rubio et al., 2021). Although often viewed as spontaneous and unstructured, socio-dramatic play places significant demands on children's self-control, as they must remain within the boundaries of the shared play narrative. Intervention studies have demonstrated that structured pretend play programmes can reduce play deficits and improve social engagement and behavioural regulation among children with additional learning or developmental needs (Stagnitti et al., 2018; Goldstein & Lerner, 2021).

One aspect of socio-dramatic play that frequently raises concern among parents and educators is play involving toy weapons. However, recent research suggests that such concerns are often misplaced and that adult attempts to ban or suppress this form of play may be counterproductive. Studies indicate that play involving themes of power or conflict is typically symbolic and rule-governed, and is distinguishable from real aggression. Like other forms of socio-dramatic play, it supports the development of cooperation, negotiation, and social understanding within contexts that are meaningful to children's lived and imagined experiences (Holland, 2018; Whitebread et al., 2020).

### **2.2.7 Games with Rules**

Young children are naturally motivated to explore their environment and develop an understanding of social order, and an early interest in rules is a key feature of this process. From an early age, children are drawn to games with rules and often create their own. As children grow, their play evolves from simple physical games, such as

chasing and hiding, to more complex activities, including board games, card games, sports, and digital games. Participation in games with rules plays a significant role in social development by supporting skills such as turn-taking, fairness, cooperation, and perspective-taking (Baker et al., 2019).

In recent years, digital and electronic games have become an increasingly prominent feature of children's play experiences. While concerns remain regarding excessive screen use, current research presents a nuanced picture. Large-scale studies suggest that moderate engagement with video games does not negatively affect children's social relationships or academic performance and may be associated with certain cognitive benefits, including problem-solving and spatial reasoning skills (Granic et al., 2019; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019). Furthermore, well-designed digital games that promote exploration, collaboration, and problem-solving have been found to offer developmental benefits comparable to those of traditional constructive and rule-based play when used appropriately (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020).

### **2.3 Significance of Play-Based Activities in Early Childhood Education**

In recent years, play has been widely recognized as a fundamental approach to teaching and learning in early childhood education. Contemporary research affirms that play is a complex and multifaceted concept that cannot be restricted to a single definition. Current scholars describe play as a meaningful context through which children explore their environment, construct knowledge, and express creativity (Zosh et al., 2018). Similarly, recent studies emphasize play as a central mechanism through which children develop communication skills, social competence, and self-awareness, thereby supporting both cognitive and socio-emotional development (Whitebread et al., 2020).

Evidence from recent studies indicates that when young children engage in play-based learning experiences, they actively make sense of their surroundings through exploration, experimentation, and direct interaction with materials and peers. Play-based activities provide rich opportunities for children to test ideas, solve problems, and learn through hands-on experiences. Such engagement is critical for promoting holistic development, encompassing emotional, social, physical, and intellectual growth. Through sustained participation in play, children develop foundational skills and dispositions that prepare them for future learning and everyday life challenges (Pyle et al., 2021; Weisberg et al., 2016).

From early childhood, children demonstrate emerging skills, interests, and competencies that form the foundation for later development. Research suggests that children approach play with intentionality and focus, using it as a context for acquiring new skills and understanding social norms. Play supports children's ability to differentiate between ideas, actions, and objects, while also strengthening executive function skills such as self-control, planning, and flexible thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 2018). In addition to cognitive benefits, play contributes significantly to emotional and social adjustment, fostering self-confidence, autonomy, and positive self-concept among young learners (Goldstein & Lerner, 2021).

Play-based learning also enhances children's engagement with school by creating positive learning experiences that encourage attendance, participation, and improved social and academic outcomes. Within the Ghanaian context, national curriculum frameworks emphasize play as a core pedagogical approach for early childhood education, recognizing its role in promoting meaningful learning and positive teacher-child relationships (NaCCA, 2019). Through play, children's individual strengths, interests, and social abilities are revealed, enabling teachers to support

respectful interactions, cooperation, and awareness of others within the classroom community (UNICEF, 2020).

Consistent with sociocultural perspectives, learning is influenced by the beliefs, values, and practices embedded within a child's cultural environment. Play-based pedagogy aligns closely with children's cultural contexts, allowing them to engage with familiar symbols, roles, and experiences. Through thoughtfully designed play activities, social values, cultural norms, and shared practices can be transmitted and reinforced, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of Ghana's diverse cultural heritage while supporting children's identity development (Rogoff, 2018; Fler, 2021).

#### **2.4 Teachers' Views Towards the Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy**

The implementation of play-based pedagogy has gained considerable attention in early childhood education globally, as it aligns with the developmental needs of young children. Teachers, being the primary implementers of the curriculum, hold pivotal views that influence the success or challenges of adopting this pedagogical approach.

Early childhood education in Ghana continues to garner significant attention due to the government's dedication to enhancing quality education at all levels. The 2006 Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum emphasized six learning areas: language and literacy, environmental studies, numeracy, creative activities, music, dance and drama, and physical development, advocating for play-based pedagogy as a key approach to facilitating children's learning (Dzamesi & Heerden, 2020). Similarly, the 2019 standards-based curriculum, currently implemented by the Ghana Education Service (GES), prioritizes skill acquisition in the 4Rs Reading, writing, arithmetic,

and creativity for early childhood learners. This curriculum emphasizes play-based activities as the foundation for effective teaching and learning, fostering a positive environment where learners feel emotionally and physically secure to thrive.

The play-based approach is central to reforms aimed at improving early childhood education (KG-B3) in Ghana. However, its successful implementation requires teachers or facilitators with strong content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and the confidence to guide meaningful learning through play-based methods in familiar contexts (Dzamesi & Heerden, 2020). Despite these ambitions, many ECE teachers lack a comprehensive understanding of play-based pedagogy. The adoption of play-based activities faces challenges, including inadequate professional development opportunities for teachers (Aiono, et al., 2019).

Research findings (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2011; Buabeng-Andoh, 2012) and commissioned reports (Associates for Change, 2016; Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, 2012) reveal that early childhood education teachers are often inadequately prepared to effectively implement play-based pedagogy. This lack of preparedness is attributed to insufficient coverage of play-based pedagogy in pre-service teacher training programs (Sofu, Thompson & Kanton, 2015; Tamanja, 2016) and the absence of ongoing in-service professional development initiatives to address challenges related to knowledge and skills (Vorkapic & Katic, 2015; Hedge et al., 2009; Hedge et al., 2014).

Additionally, school supervisors' and teachers' perceptions of play significantly influence its adoption as a teaching method (Kekesi et al., 2019). Positive perceptions encourage using play as an instructional technique, while negative perceptions hinder its application. Although many early childhood educators hold favorable views about

play-based activities, their limited understanding often leaves them uncertain about how and when to incorporate such activities effectively into their lessons.

To address this, it is recommended that head teachers and supervisors organize regular in-service training and enhance supervision to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for employing play-based pedagogy effectively. Studies by Aras (2016) and Lemay et al. (2016) further highlight that early childhood educators recognize the importance of play-based activities in fostering children's learning, reinforcing its role as a key element of effective teaching practices.

Research indicates that while teachers recognize the value of play-based pedagogy, their lack of understanding often prevents its effective implementation. For instance, Smith and Brown (2013) found that many educators refrain from integrating play-based activities into language instruction due to insufficient knowledge of how to do so effectively. Similarly, Adams et al. (2014) reported that although preschool teachers acknowledge the importance of play-based learning, they rarely prioritize it. Challenges such as limited time allocation, inadequate resources, large class sizes, unsuitable spaces, lack of teacher training, and insufficient support from administrators and parents were identified as key barriers to its adoption.

Additionally, Carter (2015), Jones et al. (2017), and Davis (2016) suggest that teachers' perceptions and understanding of play-based pedagogy are significantly influenced by curriculum demands, pre-service training, and ongoing professional development. This lack of adequate preparation has led many educators to rely on traditional, teacher-directed instructional methods rather than adopting play-based approaches. Some researchers have also observed that teachers tend to view play and

learning as distinct and separate activities, further hindering the integration of play into teaching (Jones et al., 2017; White, 2015).

Moreover, other studies emphasize the need for teachers to perceive play as both a vital learning strategy and a means to support children's well-being (Anderson et al., 2017; Lee, 2015). Despite this, the implementation of play-based pedagogy continues to be challenged by curriculum structures that emphasize academic skills over critical emotional and social development, prompting teachers to revert to traditional methods (Green & Li, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016; Carter et al., 2011).

The literature highlights a debate regarding the limited use of play in kindergarten, often linked to teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness as a teaching method. For instance, some early childhood educators view play as an ineffective instructional strategy, while others strongly support its role in facilitating learning (Johnson & Brown, 2010; Campbell, 2008).

Research suggests that the irregular use of play-based activities in early childhood centers is not entirely intentional but rather stems from teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and skills to effectively integrate these activities into their lessons (Smith & Taylor, 2014; Adams et al., 2016; Green, 2017). This gap in understanding has hindered the consistent implementation of play, despite its emphasis in the current standard-based curriculum. Consequently, many educators find themselves ill-equipped to employ play-based pedagogy regularly and effectively in their classrooms (Lee & Martin, 2013; Carter et al., 2015).

According to Davis, Johnson, and Brooks (2012), teachers' perceptions and understanding of play-based activities significantly influence children's learning

experiences. Early childhood educators must grasp the importance of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, such as learning through play, and their critical role in fostering early childhood development. Educators who do not align their teaching methods with the developmental stages of children may face challenges in supporting learners to achieve their full potential (Smith & Harper, 2015).

Recent studies emphasize the critical role of teachers' understanding in the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy. According to Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2023), many teachers acknowledge the theoretical benefits of play in enhancing creativity, critical thinking, and social development among young learners. However, a significant number of educators struggle to connect these theoretical benefits to practical application in the classroom. This gap between understanding and practice often stems from limited professional training or exposure to play-based methodologies (Chen et al., 2023).

Additionally, teachers' understanding is frequently shaped by their educational background and training. Akerson and Young (2022) found that educators who receive comprehensive training in play-based techniques are more confident in incorporating these activities into their teaching practices. Conversely, those with insufficient training often revert to traditional, teacher-centered methods, perceiving play-based approaches as less effective or time-consuming.

Teachers' attitudes toward play-based pedagogy are influenced by a combination of personal beliefs and systemic factors. Positive attitudes are often linked to a recognition of play as a vital tool for holistic development. For instance, a study by Roberts and Tanaka (2021) highlighted that teachers who view play as integral to learning are more likely to prioritize it in their lesson plans. These educators

understand that play fosters not only academic skills but also emotional and social competencies.

However, some educators hold negative or ambivalent attitudes toward play-based pedagogy. Such attitudes are often rooted in misconceptions about its effectiveness or its alignment with academic goals. Singh and Patel (2022) reported that teachers who are under pressure to meet standardized academic benchmarks perceive play as a distraction rather than a teaching strategy. This perception is particularly prevalent in contexts where education systems emphasize rote learning and formal assessments over developmental milestones.

Several factors shape teachers' views on the implementation of play-based pedagogy, including curriculum demands, classroom environment, and cultural expectations. The structure and expectations of the curriculum play a significant role in influencing teachers' views. A study by Nyarko et al. (2023) in Ghana revealed that while the current standard-based curriculum advocates for play-based learning, teachers often feel constrained by the need to cover extensive academic content within limited timeframes. This conflict leads to skepticism about the feasibility of integrating play-based activities effectively.

The availability of resources and class sizes also impact teachers' perceptions. According to Johnson et al. (2022), educators in under-resourced schools often view play-based pedagogy as impractical due to insufficient materials and overcrowded classrooms. These limitations hinder their ability to facilitate meaningful play activities, reinforcing a preference for more structured, teacher-directed approaches. Cultural beliefs about education and play significantly influence teachers' attitudes. In many cultures, play is not traditionally associated with learning, leading to resistance

among educators and parents alike. Lee and Zhang (2021) found that in Asian contexts, where academic achievement is highly valued, teachers are less likely to embrace play-based methods due to parental expectations and societal norms.

Despite these challenges, many teachers recognize the potential benefits of play-based pedagogy and express a willingness to adopt it with adequate support. According to Green and Walker (2023), teachers who experience ongoing professional development are more likely to adopt positive attitudes toward play-based methods. Such training helps them understand how to balance play with academic goals and tailor activities to meet curricular standards.

Moreover, collaborative support systems, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), have been found to enhance teachers' confidence in implementing play-based pedagogy. Brown et al. (2022) highlighted that teachers who engage in PLCs develop a deeper appreciation for play as a teaching tool and gain practical strategies for overcoming implementation challenges.

Teachers' views on the implementation of play-based pedagogy are diverse and shaped by a range of factors, including their understanding, attitudes, and contextual influences. While many educators acknowledge the value of play in early childhood education, challenges such as limited training, resource constraints, and cultural expectations often hinder its effective implementation. To address these issues, it is essential to provide targeted professional development, sufficient resources, and supportive policies that align with the principles of play-based learning. By fostering a positive and well-informed perspective among teachers, the potential of play-based pedagogy to transform early childhood education can be fully realized.

## **2.5 Teacher Training and the Use of Play in Teaching and Learning**

Studies over the past decade underscore that teacher preparation plays a pivotal role in enabling effective play-based pedagogy in early childhood settings. A strong foundation in both theory and practice is essential for educators to design and implement play that supports learning objectives, holistic development, and curriculum alignment (Harris, 2021; Ndlovu et al., 2023). It is widely acknowledged that pre-service training must include experiential components, such as classroom practicum, modeling of play scenarios, and reflective observation, to bridge the gap between abstract understanding and practical skill (Whitebread et al., 2020).

Experienced educators in lower-resource environments often report that their formal teacher education included theoretical discussions of play but lacked practical exercises involving play-based instruction. Without guided exposure to real classroom settings, many teachers enter the profession feeling underprepared to create purposeful play activities for literacy, numeracy, or social-emotional learning (Onyango, Koech & Mwoma, 2023). Literature repeatedly documents this challenge: teacher candidates may learn about the benefits of play, yet struggle to translate that into structured opportunities that align with learning outcomes (Clark, 2020).

In-service professional development significantly influences teacher efficacy. Well-designed workshops and refresher courses that include demonstrations, peer coaching, and lesson-planning support can boost teachers' confidence and competence in implementing guided play (Fisher et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2022). However, recent field studies show that many early childhood educators receive infrequent or poorly accessible training on play-based methods. Physical distance, scheduling conflicts, and training that remains disconnected from the classroom context all contribute to a

gap between professional knowledge and practice (Marfo & Biersteker, 2025). Consequently, many teachers rely on informal peer learning or sporadic NGO interventions rather than systematic district-led support.

Peer learning emerges as a critical resource in many settings. When structured mentorship and collaboration are lacking, teachers nonetheless form informal communities where they share ideas, observe each other's classrooms, and co-develop materials (Broadhead et al., 2018). Such collegial exchange helps teachers pick up practical strategies for designing play activities even when formal training is limited.

Confidence in implementing play-based strategies typically correlates with exposure to modeled practice and ongoing professional support. Educators who have observed well-managed play sessions and received guidance in lesson planning are more likely to feel capable of using diverse play approaches such as role play, storytelling, or manipulatives to meet specific learning objectives (Zosh et al., 2018; Weisberg et al., 2016). In contexts where training includes examples of linking play to curriculum outcomes and developmental domains, teachers report greater intentionality and better alignment between play activities and learning goals (Fisher et al., 2019).

Yet, even where initial training offers solid grounding, support systems often fail to provide sustained coaching or curriculum guidance. Literature on early childhood systems in African and Asian settings highlights that many teachers receive minimal follow-up from school or district officials. Professional development is typically one-off and detached from classroom conditions, and mentoring or curriculum feedback is rare (Onyango et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

Several scholars emphasize the importance of linking play with developmental theory and holistic learning goals. When training programs consistently present play not only as a pedagogical tool but as integral to children's emotional, physical, and social development, teachers are better able to craft intentional experiences that nurture the whole child (Bodrova & Leong, 2018; Ndlovu et al., 2023). In contrast, training that focuses narrowly on academic outcomes may lead to play being treated instrumentally rather than developmentally.

Institutional support or lack thereof is frequently cited as a barrier to effective play-based teaching. Without resources, training reinforcement, and leadership support, teachers are left to their own devices, resulting in sporadic or inconsistent implementation. Policy studies in contexts similar to Ghana reveal that when district officials prioritize curriculum enforcement over pedagogical innovation, play suffers as a result (Meeuwissen et al., 2025). School leaders who lack training in play pedagogy may not offer adequate guidance or allocate time and resources for play-rich classrooms. Moreover, effective teacher training must be culturally responsive. Incorporating local play traditions, games, and storytelling into teacher preparation not only enhances relevance but also validates cultural identity and deepens engagement (Marfo & Biersteker, 2025). Professional development that encourages teachers to adapt play materials from local contexts fosters sustainability and meaningful learning environments.

Pre-service training provides essential theoretical grounding, but effective practice requires training that includes examples of play-based strategies, lesson planning, and classroom simulations. When such components are present, teachers often report increased confidence in facilitating various play types for academic and

developmental learning (Weisberg et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2019). Where such practical content is absent, educators experience uncertainty and tend to learn on the job or rely on peer observation (Clark, 2020). In-service development, while valuable, suffers from accessibility issues. Workshops are often infrequent and disconnected both geographically and pedagogically. Teachers working in underserved regions may receive no regular coaching or curriculum alignment guidance, hampering the consistent and effective use of play-based pedagogy (Onyango et al., 2023). This gap is more problematic in systems where standardized curricula emphasize curriculum delivery without focusing on pedagogy.

Peer learning emerges as a significant resource in teacher development. Sharing strategies, observing each other's lessons, and co-designing materials through collegial networks help compensate for formal training deficiencies (Broadhead et al., 2018). These practices build informal capacity but cannot replace structured professional support from leadership or education offices.

Confidence in using play-based activities, such as guided play, role-playing, or storytelling, is higher among teachers who have experienced training that includes practical examples and modeling (Zosh et al., 2018). Teachers who learn through both observation and practice report greater ability to link play with curriculum goals and cognitive objectives.

At the same time, institutional support remains inconsistent. Without regular guidance, mentorship, or feedback from school administrators or district facilitators, teachers often feel isolated in their efforts to implement play. Policy literature points to the need for systemic investment in teacher coaching and leadership capacity (Meeuwissen et al., 2025).

Training that addresses how play supports holistic child development including motor, social, and emotional growth tends to yield deeper teacher buy-in and richer implementation (Ndlovu et al., 2023). When holistic development is central in teacher preparation, educators are more likely to integrate inclusive and developmentally appropriate play experiences.

Importantly, the breadth of variability in teachers' experiences and in the reported confidence levels points to systemic issues rather than individual competence. Commonly reported challenges include programmatic gaps in pre-service curricula, lack of targeted in-service support, weak institutional coaching, and resource constraints. Addressing these issues requires coherent policy action that aligns training content with classroom realities and ensures consistent follow-up.

## **2.6 Teaching and Learning Resources Available to Teachers' Use of Play in Teaching and Learning**

Early childhood education experts agree that adequate teaching and learning resources are essential to effective play-based pedagogy. Quality manipulatives, outdoor areas, dedicated play corners, and curriculum-aligned teaching aids enable young learners to explore, experiment, and engage meaningfully.

One striking insight is that teachers most often rely on improvised materials, for example, workouts made from cardboard, bottle tops, textiles, and local items (Smith, 2018). While this highlights teacher resourcefulness and adaptability, it simultaneously reflects persistent deficiencies in formal support systems. As studies in Ghana and East Africa demonstrate, improvisation is common in under-resourced classrooms (Perivoli Trust, 2021; Selepe et al., 2024), but it places significant time burdens on educators and may fail to meet developmental learning needs.

Likewise, structured play and learning corners such as literacy or numeracy zones are present in some classrooms but not uniformly established or well-equipped. When properly implemented, these spatial arrangements support differentiated, child-led exploration and scaffold curriculum-aligned play (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Crowther et al., 2013). However, in practice, many of these settings lack variety or fail to spark sustained, creative engagement.

Early childhood research increasingly highlights the importance of gross motor development, sensory exploration, and risk-taking in outdoor environments (Embodied Cognition Review, 2018; Zosh et al., 2018). In low-income urban early learning centres, echoing conditions across playgrounds, climbing structures, or open natural areas are infrequently provided (Clarkson et al., 2025). This gap restricts a key domain of child development and curtails opportunities for active, multi-sensory learning.

Teachers report minimal or irregular supply of play resources from district offices or school management, which aligns with broader studies in Ghana and East Africa showing inequitable distribution of materials, with some schools receiving nothing at all (Frimpong, 2021; Onyango et al., 2023). Such inconsistency undermines equity in access and limits broader pedagogical sustainability. Furthermore, classroom infrastructure and storage facilities are often inadequate. Research from similar contexts confirms that lack of safe storage areas, resource shelves, or organized play zones leads to deterioration of materials and reduces the frequency of use (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Selepe et al., 2024). Proper maintenance practices are key to preserving resource quality, and poor infrastructure directly impacts longevity and utility.

Surprisingly, teachers still report that the resources available, albeit limited, encourage some level of creativity and hands-on exploration. Scholars emphasize that open-ended materials foster child-led inquiry, imaginative thinking, and fine motor coordination (NAEYC, 2022; Zosh et al., 2018). However, when materials are predictable or used repetitively, they lose developmental potency over time, a finding echoed in preschool research in East Africa (Mutindi et al., 2020; Abebe & Keery, 2023).

Although improvisation is a creative strength, literature underscores that teacher innovation alone is not sufficient. Educators need structured access to developmentally appropriate resources and organized systems to maintain and integrate them into play-based curricula. Without that formal support, improvisation can become unsustainable and uneven in quality and effectiveness (Perivoli Trust, 2021; Frimpong, 2021).

A recurrent theme in both data and literature is the gap between policy aspiration and practice. Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum enshrines play as a central instructional tool, yet many early childhood centres lack corresponding resources or infrastructural support. This misalignment reflects broader challenges in policy implementation across countries striving to adopt child-centered pedagogies without matching investment in classroom-level supports (Meeuwissen et al., 2025; Ndlovu et al., 2023).

Comparative studies across East and West Africa reveal similar patterns: reliance on local improvisation, systemic resource fragility, limited outdoor facilities, and overwork among teachers who supplement deficits with creative adaptations (Mutindi et al., 2020; Abebe & Keery, 2023; Onyango et al., 2023; Selepe et al., 2024). These

constraints, while fostering ingenuity, also introduce inequities across schools and classrooms.

One promising avenue is leveraging culturally relevant play materials and local traditions. Integrating indigenous games, songs, and oral storytelling into resource creation boosts engagement, cultural identity, and instructional relevance (Marfo & Biersteker, 2025; African Storybook, 2023). Educators trained to incorporate these elements enrich resources while also grounding pedagogical content in children's lived experience.

Studies in Nigeria and Uganda have demonstrated how cultural plays—such as local counting rhymes, game songs, and traditional narratives—can function as educational tools that support literacy, numeracy, and social cohesion (Okwany et al., 2011; African Storybook, 2023). When teachers adapt or co-create culturally grounded materials, children benefit from relevant and resonant learning experiences.

Moving forward, research and expert guidance recommend a blended approach: systematic provision of core playkits, paired with teacher ingenuity in resource adaptation, with sustained infrastructure and maintenance plans. Credentialed pre-service and in-service training should include modules on play resource design, lesson integration, storage strategies, and curriculum alignment (Fisher et al., 2019; Van As & Excell, 2018; Aina & Bipath, 2022).

Practical recommendations include: distributing standardized kits of manipulatives and story materials to all kindergarten classrooms; investing in playgrounds or natural outdoor play zones; building classroom storage units and play corners; training

teachers in improvisation and cultural play resource design; and establishing monitoring systems for resource maintenance.

## **2.7 Effectiveness of Teachers' Use of Play in Teaching and Learning**

Play has long been regarded as an essential component of childhood, but in recent years, its recognition as a legitimate and effective pedagogical tool has gained significant traction in the field of early childhood education. Educators and researchers increasingly emphasize that play is not merely a recreational activity; rather, it constitutes a powerful vehicle for delivering curriculum content, fostering developmental milestones, and shaping meaningful learning experiences (Harris, 2023; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Within the context of early learning centres, especially in kindergartens, play emerges as a method that is developmentally appropriate, culturally adaptable, and cognitively enriching.

Modern theories of learning provide strong support for play-based pedagogy. Drawing from the foundational work of Piaget and Vygotsky, more recent literature continues to validate the role of social and exploratory learning in early childhood. While Piaget's theories emphasized self-directed, constructive engagement with materials, Vygotsky (1978) underlined the social nature of learning, particularly through shared activities and interactions within a child's Zone of Proximal Development. These theoretical perspectives have been revisited and supported by contemporary research on embodied cognition, which shows that young children learn more effectively when they physically interact with their environment, integrating sensory, motor, and cognitive processing (Embodied Cognition Overview, 2018). This form of active engagement is most naturally facilitated through play.

In classroom practice, the use of play has proven effective in enhancing learner engagement. When children are immersed in playful activities whether structured or open-ended they tend to exhibit increased motivation, focus, and participation. According to Pyle and Danniels (2017), children involved in play-based tasks maintain attention for longer periods and show greater curiosity and willingness to explore learning materials. Engagement through play is often deeper and more sustained than traditional instructional approaches, largely because it aligns with children's natural learning styles and interests.

Play also supports the development of foundational academic skills. Recent studies highlight that when teachers intentionally integrate play into their lessons, learners exhibit gains in early literacy, numeracy, and language acquisition. For instance, research by Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2016) demonstrates that guided play where the teacher subtly steers the activity towards specific learning outcomes results in measurable improvements in vocabulary and comprehension. Children engaged in storytelling games, letter matching, or counting activities during play sessions not only grasp concepts more easily but also retain them longer. The strength of guided play lies in its balance between child agency and adult direction, ensuring that educational goals are met without compromising the joy and spontaneity of play.

Beyond cognitive development, play nurtures social and emotional growth. Through collaborative activities such as role-playing, block building, and group games, children learn to negotiate roles, express feelings, resolve conflicts, and cooperate toward shared objectives. Ndlovu, Okeke, and Nhase (2023) affirm that learners in play-rich environments develop better communication and peer interaction skills, even in resource-constrained contexts. These skills often referred to as 21st-century

competencies are increasingly recognized as essential outcomes of early education. Smilansky's (1968) work on socio-dramatic play remains relevant today, as it shows that imaginative play contributes to more advanced language use and social behavior, especially when children are supported by adults or more capable peers.

Another compelling advantage of play-based learning is its role in facilitating authentic assessment. Traditional assessments such as tests and worksheets can be limiting, particularly for young children whose expressive abilities may not yet match their cognitive understanding. Play, by contrast, offers a low-pressure, naturalistic setting in which educators can observe and assess learners' skills and developmental progress. Forman and Fyfe (2012) argue that teachers gain more comprehensive insights into a child's learning when they assess performance within the context of meaningful activity. Recent technological advances have begun to complement this approach. For example, Yang et al. (2025) developed a system using large language models to analyze children's language and behavior during play, yielding highly accurate developmental profiles without interrupting the learning process. Such innovations reaffirm the idea that play is not just a tool for instruction, but also a valuable lens through which learning can be evaluated.

Importantly, the educational value of play has been affirmed by national and international curricula. In Ghana, the Standards-Based Curriculum for kindergarten (NaCCA, 2019) explicitly endorses play as a primary mode of instruction. It calls for child-centered, activity-based approaches that reflect children's real-life experiences and promote holistic development. Globally, both UNICEF and UNESCO have stressed the role of play in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, positioning it as a right rather than a privilege (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2023).

These policies advocate for learning environments that are both academically rigorous and emotionally supportive qualities that are well-captured in play-based settings.

Despite the overwhelming evidence in favor of play, its implementation is not without challenges. One common issue is the misconception among some stakeholders that play lacks academic seriousness. Teachers, especially in systems influenced by high-stakes testing and performance metrics, often feel pressured to reduce or eliminate play in favor of direct instruction (Meeuwissen et al., 2025). Such attitudes can be particularly pronounced in regions where early education is viewed primarily as preparation for primary school. Yet, studies consistently show that children who experience rich play environments in early years are better prepared—not only academically, but socially and emotionally for later schooling (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020).

Another barrier is the lack of teacher training in play facilitation. Research indicates that while many educators value play in theory, they lack the practical knowledge to design and implement effective play-based lessons (Onyango, Koech, & Mwoma, 2023). Intentionality is critical; play must be purposeful and linked to curricular goals, not simply unstructured free time. Fisher et al. (2011) stress the importance of professional development that equips teachers with the skills to scaffold play activities, observe learning outcomes, and adjust instruction accordingly.

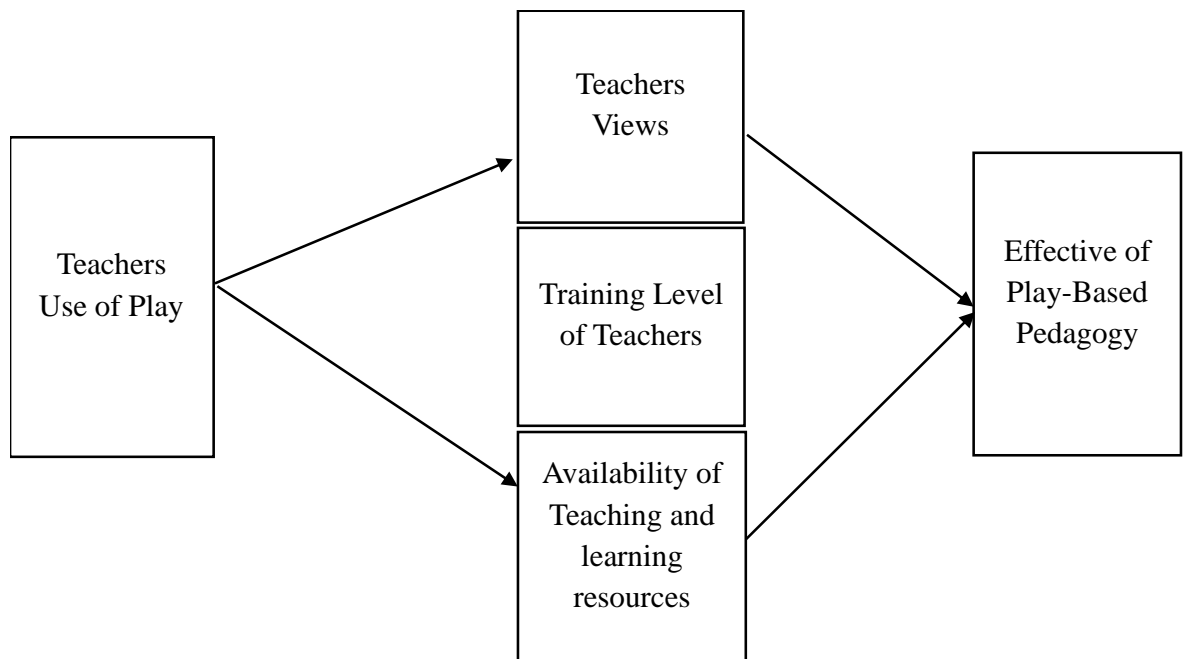
Resource limitations further complicate the picture. In low-income or rural settings, early childhood centres often struggle with inadequate space, materials, and trained personnel. Nevertheless, studies like those by Ndlovu et al. (2023) show that even minimal resources, when combined with teacher creativity and community engagement, can yield positive results. Teachers often improvise using locally

available materials, and cultural games become invaluable assets in these contexts. Marfo and Biersteker (2025) advocate for the inclusion of traditional African play forms in classroom instruction, emphasizing their dual function as tools for learning and cultural preservation. Integrating songs, dance, and storytelling into the curriculum not only makes learning more engaging but also affirms children's identities and connects classroom learning with the home environment.

The influence of culture on how play is understood and applied cannot be overstated. While Western models of play may emphasize individual exploration and pretend scenarios, other cultures value collective activity, rhythm, and oral storytelling. As Rogoff (2003) explains, learning is a culturally situated process, and pedagogy must reflect the social practices of the learners' communities. In this respect, culturally responsive play-based education becomes not only an effective pedagogical choice but also an ethical imperative.

The future of play in early childhood education lies in refining how it is planned, facilitated, and assessed. The evidence is strong: when play is thoughtfully integrated into the learning process, it enhances not only academic achievement but also creativity, resilience, and social competence. Innovations such as digital storytelling tools, artificial intelligence in assessment, and hybrid learning environments open new avenues for deepening the impact of play. However, such tools must be guided by developmental principles and equity considerations to ensure that all learners benefit equally.

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

**Source: Researcher's Self-Construct 2025**

The conceptual framework guiding this study proposes that the use of play in teaching and learning activities by kindergarten teachers is influenced by several interrelated factors. One of the key variables is teachers' views on play. When teachers perceive play as a valuable instructional strategy, they are more likely to integrate it meaningfully into their classroom practices. Their beliefs shape their willingness to design and implement play-based activities that support learning objectives. Another critical factor is the level of training teachers receive in play-based pedagogy. The depth and quality of this training significantly influence their ability and confidence to apply play methods effectively. Teachers with formal education or professional development in play-based learning are better equipped to select appropriate play strategies, align them with curriculum goals, and assess learning through play. In addition, the availability of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) plays an enabling role. Access to developmentally appropriate play resources such as manipulatives,

outdoor equipment, and creative learning tools determines how practically and frequently play can be incorporated into classroom instruction. Without adequate resources, even well-intentioned teachers may struggle to implement play-based methods effectively. At the centre of the framework is the teachers' use of play in teaching and learning, which represents the primary focus of the study. This variable captures the extent to which teachers actually employ play strategies in their daily instructional routines. Finally, the effectiveness of teachers' use of play reflects the degree to which play activities achieve desired learning outcomes. It is considered an outcome variable that is shaped by the interaction of teachers' perceptions, training, and resource availability. Together, these relationships highlight how both internal (beliefs and training) and external (resources) factors combine to influence not only whether play is used but how effectively it supports holistic early childhood development.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

This study investigated kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District. The literature was captured under three (3) categories. These categories include the theoretical framework, conceptual review, and empirical. Issues such as Sociocultural theory were captured under the theoretical review. The Concept of play, types of play, and the benefits of play were also captured under the conceptual framework. In the same vein, the empirical review captured a literature review of the research objectives. These include teachers' views towards the use of play, effectiveness of teachers' use of play in teaching and learning, teacher training and teachers' use of play, teaching and learning resources available to teachers' use of play in teaching and learning.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Overview

This chapter presented a description of the methods used to investigate kindergarten teachers' use of play-based pedagogy in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District. The chapter was organized under the following subheadings: research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

#### 3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopted the pragmatist research paradigm. Pragmatism emphasizes understanding the practical implications of ideas and beliefs (Morgan, 2014). The context of this study allows for the exploration of teachers' use of play activities in teaching and learning by examining not only their beliefs but also the real-world application of these attitudes in teaching practices.

One of the key strengths of the pragmatist paradigm is its methodological flexibility, which facilitates the use of mixed methods research. This is particularly beneficial for studying attitudes, as it enables the integration of quantitative data, such as Likert-scale responses, with qualitative insights from interviews or focus group discussions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By combining these methods, the study can capture the complexity of teachers' attitudes, including their underlying reasons and contextual influences.

Pragmatism also aligns with the study's focus on addressing practical educational challenges. Kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward play-based pedagogy are likely

influenced by factors such as resource availability, training, and institutional support. The pragmatist paradigm supports an inquiry into these factors, emphasizing actionable outcomes that can inform policy or practice (Biesta, 2010). For instance, understanding teachers' attitudes can help identify barriers to the successful implementation of play-based pedagogy and suggest strategies for overcoming them.

Additionally, pragmatism values the perspectives of stakeholders, such as teachers, and considers their lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge (Feilzer, 2010). This aligns with the study's aim to understand teachers' attitudes within the specific cultural and educational context of the Ho West District. By adopting a pragmatist approach, the study can generate findings that are not only theoretically robust but also practically relevant for improving early childhood education.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study adopted the mixed-methods research approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather and analyze data. It involves collecting and analyzing both numerical data (quantitative) and non-numerical data (qualitative) to gain a comprehensive understanding of a research problem or question (Creswell, 2013; Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021).

A mixed-methods approach is highly suitable for the study because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of complex phenomena. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, the approach offers a nuanced understanding of kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The quantitative aspect of the mixed-methods approach can provide measurable data on the prevalence and intensity of the use of play among kindergarten teachers. For instance, using structured questionnaires with a Likert scale can quantify teachers' agreement or disagreement with specific statements about play-based pedagogy. This enables the researcher to identify trends and patterns across a larger sample, ensuring generalizability of findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

On the other hand, the qualitative component allows for an in-depth exploration of the reasons behind these attitudes. Through interviews, focus groups, or open-ended questionnaire items, the study can capture teachers' personal experiences, beliefs, and challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy. This qualitative data adds depth to the numerical findings and provides context that enhances the interpretation of results (Bryman, 2016).

The integration of these methods offers several benefits. First, it facilitates triangulation, ensuring the validity and reliability of findings by cross-verifying data from different sources (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). Second, it addresses the limitations inherent in using either method alone. For example, while quantitative data might overlook the nuanced reasons behind attitudes, qualitative data might lack the breadth provided by a larger sample size. By combining these methods, the study achieves both depth and breadth.

Additionally, a mixed-methods approach aligns with the pragmatist paradigm, which underpins the study. Pragmatism values practical solutions and multiple perspectives, making it well-suited for addressing real-world issues like the implementation of play-based pedagogy. The mixed-methods design ensures that the research not only

generates theoretical insights but also provides actionable recommendations for improving early childhood education in the Ho West District.

In conclusion, the mixed-methods approach is ideal for capturing the multifaceted nature of teachers' attitudes and their implications, offering a holistic understanding that can inform policy and practice in meaningful ways.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study adopted an explanatory sequential research design, which is appropriate for investigating the complex nature of teachers' use of play-based pedagogy. The explanatory sequential design involves two distinct phases: the collection and analysis of quantitative data first, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data to further explain or elaborate on the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In the first phase, the quantitative component served as the core method, providing a broad understanding of trends and patterns regarding teachers' views, the effectiveness of play in teaching and learning, the training level of teachers, and the resources available in the use of play. Structured questionnaires, particularly those using Likert-scale items, were used to measure variables such as the availability of teaching resources, teachers' training background, and perceptions of the effectiveness of play in learning.

Following the quantitative phase, the qualitative component was conducted to provide deeper insight into the findings. Teachers were purposefully selected for follow-up interviews based on their survey responses. This allowed the researcher to explore in more detail the underlying reasons, contextual factors, and personal experiences that

might explain or expand upon the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). For example, if survey data indicated that many teachers value play-based pedagogy but still underutilize it, the interviews helped uncover factors such as limited resources, curriculum pressure, or lack of training.

This design was particularly effective in addressing the research objectives, as it enabled the researcher to first establish general trends and then gain a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping those trends. The two-phase process supports a stronger interpretation of the data, ensuring that statistical findings are not viewed in isolation but are enriched by real-world experiences and teacher narratives (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Moreover, the explanatory sequential approach aligns well with the study's pragmatist paradigm, which values practical, problem-solving research methods. By connecting quantitative patterns with qualitative depth, this design enhances the credibility and applicability of the findings, particularly in the context of early childhood education, where both measurable outcomes and contextual understanding are critical (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

### **3.4 Population**

The population includes all elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a study (Burns & Grove, 2003). Polit and Hungler (2004) also refer to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects, or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population of the study primarily comprised kindergarten teachers in early childhood education centers within the Ho West District. This population was relevant as these teachers are directly involved in the implementation of play-based pedagogy and can provide valuable insights into their attitudes, experiences, and

challenges. The population of this study comprises all kindergarten teachers. According to the District Education Directorate Report (2024), the total number of kindergarten teachers in 64 early childhood centres in the district was eighty-nine (89).

### **3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The quality of a research study depends not only on the appropriateness of its methodology and instruments but also on the suitability of the sampling strategy employed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In this study, census technique was used to include all 89 kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage and enhanced the accuracy of the study by collecting data from the entire population of interest. One of the major advantages of the census method is its high degree of correctness, as information is gathered from every unit of the population. According to Pandey and Pandey (2021), as the amount of data increases, so does the precision of the findings, and the results tend to be less biased. However, the census method can be resource-intensive, requiring more time and effort to collect data from all participants.

In addition to the census sample, the researcher employed a criterion purposive sampling technique to select nine (9) teachers who met specific criteria for the qualitative component of the study. These teachers were selected based on the following criteria: they hold early childhood education qualifications, have at least ten years of teaching experience at the kindergarten level, and have participated in training on the use of play-based pedagogy. This group was deemed capable of providing rich, contextual insights to complement the quantitative findings.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that involves the deliberate selection of participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Khan, 2020). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), purposive sampling enhances the applicability and usefulness of the study by focusing on individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience. Mujere (2016) further explains that this method allows researchers to conserve resources by targeting participants who are most likely to provide meaningful data. Schreier (2018) also supports this approach, noting that it improves research efficiency by narrowing the sample to those with direct relevance to the topic under investigation.

Despite these benefits, purposive sampling carries potential drawbacks. The subjective nature of participant selection may introduce researcher bias, as the choice of participants can be influenced by pre-existing assumptions or expectations (Rai & Thapa, 2015). To minimize such bias, this study applied clear, objective criteria for participant selection and ensured transparency in the sampling process.

In summary, the combination of census sampling for the broader quantitative component and purposive sampling for the qualitative follow-up allowed the study to benefit from both breadth and depth. This mixed approach ensured not only comprehensive data coverage but also enriched understanding through the perspectives of experienced, well-trained early childhood educators.

### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments**

The study employed structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide as the data collection instruments.

#### **3.6.1 Questionnaires**

According to Cohen, et al (2011), a questionnaire is widely used and is a useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured numerical data, and can be administered without the presence of the researcher. The choice of the questionnaire was based on the assertion of Cook, et al (2017) that they are particularly advantageous whenever the sample size is large enough to make it uneconomical for reasons of time or funds to observe or interview every subject.

Despite these strengths, the weaknesses are that the respondents may not complete the questionnaire, resulting in low response rates (Cook, et al, 2017). In other cases, if respondents do not understand some questions, there is no opportunity for them to have the meaning clarified (Pallant, 2017). However, the limitations that came with the questionnaire will be resolved as the researcher will explain the purpose of the questionnaire clearly to the respondents.

Some aspects of the instruments were adapted for data collection. In developing these items, the reviewed literature was taken into consideration. The items on the questionnaire were carefully selected, reviewed, and contextualized from previously reviewed literature. The items were carefully developed to measure the construct to achieve the purpose of the study. The items were categorised into a four-point Likert scale with various score values. The questionnaire was divided into five (5) sections for the respondents. Section 'A' consists of background information on the respondents. Section B captured kindergarten teachers' views on the use of play, the

level of training teachers receive in the use of play was captured in Section C, Section D highlighted the available resources in the use of play in teaching and learning, and finally, the effectiveness of teachers' use of play was captured in Section E.

### **3.6.2 Interview Instrument**

To gain in-depth insights into the use of play in teaching and learning in kindergarten centres within the Ho West District, a semi-structured interview guide was employed. The guide was developed based on the research objectives and questions of the study and targeted kindergarten teachers with relevant experience in early childhood education.

According to Creswell (2009), a semi-structured interview is neither entirely rigid nor completely open-ended, making it ideal for exploring complex educational practices. It typically begins with a set of predefined questions but allows for flexibility in the sequence and formulation of follow-up questions based on the natural flow of conversation. This format enabled the researcher to probe for deeper explanations and contextual factors while maintaining alignment with the study's key themes.

The use of a semi-structured interview guide was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore teachers' experiences, views, and practices related to the implementation of play-based pedagogy. It also created room for participants to share detailed narratives and examples, offering richer qualitative data (Kallio et al., 2016).

The interview guide was designed to elicit responses that addressed the core focus of the research. Specifically, it included questions related to; teachers' views of the value and role of play in early childhood education, their experiences with the effectiveness of the use of play activities in classroom instruction, the training they had received on

play-based teaching methods, the availability and quality of teaching and learning resources for implementing play-based learning.

The guide was organized into two sections. Section A captured demographic information such as participants' teaching experience, qualifications, and training background. Section B consisted of open-ended, in-depth questions that directly addressed the study's research questions.

Again, using a semi-structured yet flexible approach increases the likelihood that all relevant research questions are thoroughly addressed, while still allowing participants to speak freely and express their experiences authentically (Kusi, 2012). This made the semi-structured interview guide a valuable tool for capturing the nuanced realities of kindergarten teachers implementing play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the instrument**

Trustworthiness criteria were established for the semi-structured interview guide. One major research aim was to put the knowledge created into practice. As a result, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the general public must understand and accept the findings as legitimate. Trustworthiness criteria are one way researchers can convince themselves and readers that their study findings are worthy of attention (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The criteria established were confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility.

#### **3.7.1 Confirmability**

In qualitative research, confirmability is a crucial criterion for establishing the trustworthiness of the study. It refers to the degree to which the researcher's biases are minimized and the findings accurately reflect the participants' perspectives and

experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques such as member checking and maintaining an audit trail are commonly used to enhance confirmability (Creswell, 2013)." The researcher guaranteed confirmability by preventing his knowledge, values, and conclusions from impacting the study's findings. Each phase of the data analysis was included in the study, including the conclusions that were derived as suggested by Charmaz in Kusi (2012)

### **3.7.2 Dependability**

Dependability is a critical aspect of qualitative research, emphasizing the need for consistency and traceability in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By maintaining an audit trail and providing clear documentation of research procedures, researchers enhance the dependability of their study (Creswell, 2013). To increase the dependability of the study findings, the researcher asked clear questions throughout the data collection, minimized bias, and controlled objectivity.

### **3.7.3 Transferability**

Transferability is a key consideration in qualitative research, focusing on the applicability of the study's findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, researchers enhance the transferability of their findings, enabling readers to assess the relevance to their situations (Creswell, 2013).

### **3.7.4 Credibility**

Credibility is a cornerstone of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. It focuses on demonstrating the rigor of the research process and the soundness of the interpretations drawn from the data (Horsman, 2018). Techniques such as prolonged

engagement, triangulation, and member checking contribute to enhancing the credibility of the study's findings (Creswell, 2013).

### **3.8 Reliability of Quantitative Instrument**

Reliability is generally defined as the degree to which a measure of a construct is consistent and dependable. Petters, Asuquo, and Eyo (2015) further define 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 several 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 to test the consistency of the research instrument. The research instruments were improved by revising or deleting items.

### **3.9 Pilot-Testing**

A pilot test of the instrument was carried out to check the reliability of the instrument. The instruments were pilot-tested in kindergarten Centres in the Ho Municipality. 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 the researcher any ambiguity, incoherence, or incomprehension that they would experience about any aspect of the draft questionnaire. The necessary corrections were made after the trial testing. The pilot test results were used to determine the reliability of the instruments with Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency. The Statistical Product for Service Solution (Version 25.0) was used for the computations.

The researcher carried out the pilot test in some selected kindergarten centres in the Ho Municipal due to the similarities in characteristics. Five kindergarten centres were

conveniently selected with a sample of ten (10) teachers. Connelly (2008) stipulates that a sample size for a pilot test should be 10% of the sample projected for the main study. All corrections were identified for restructuring the questions. Adequate attention was given to each item to ensure that all items were without any ambiguity before producing the final copies to administer to the main participants of the study. Thus, after the pilot test, a Cronbach alpha value of 0.826 was attained which shows that the instrument is highly reliable.

### **3.10 Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher, before embarking on the data collection, obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood, University of Education, Winneba to seek permission from the various schools, offices, and other concerned authorities. The letter spelled out the purpose of the study, the need for individual participation and anonymity as well as the confidentiality of respondents' responses. The management of the Ho West District Education Directorate issued an introductory letter to the sampled schools to grant the researcher access to the data collection. After establishing the necessary contact with the head teachers of the selected schools and authorized offices, permission was obtained from the school authorities for the administration of the instruments. The researcher also trained research assistants for the collection of the data. 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 enabled the researcher to have uniform information and to facilitate a high return rate. There was a 100% return rate for the quantitative data.

A face-to-face interview was conducted by the researcher on selected headteachers on the implementation of the play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District. The duration for the interview lasted between 15-20 minutes. Their responses were audio recorded. In order to ensure a high return rate, the researcher ensured that, questionnaires were given out and retrieved on the same day.

### **3.11 Data Processing and Analysis**

The research data collected were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The field data was collated, sifted through, and edited in order to address questions that have been answered partially or not answered. The questionnaires were serially numbered to facilitate easy identification. It is necessary to observe this precaution to ensure quick detection of any source of errors which occurred in the tabulation of the data. After editing and coding, the data was entered into the computer using the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS version 25.0) software.

Before performing the desired data transformation, the data was cleaned by running consistency checks on every variable. Modifications were made after verification of the questionnaires. The demographic variables from the questionnaire were primarily analysed using frequencies and percentages. The frequencies and percentages were based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire were analysed based on the research questions set for the study using descriptive statistics (means-Ms and standard deviations-SDs).

For the qualitative data (interviews) were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reading through a data set (such as transcripts from in depth interviews or focus groups), and identifying patterns in meaning across the data to derive themes. Thematic analysis involves an active

process of reflexivity, where a researcher's subjective experience plays a central role in meaning making from data. Numbers were given to the interviews to make easy identification; this was done to ensure effective presentation and analysis of the data. The researcher independently codes the transcripts, group the codes and generate themes and sub-themes using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data into the adopted models. The themes and sub-themes were discussed among team members to ensure the data is faithfully captured.

### **3.12 Ethical Considerations**

To abide by the ethical principles of the study, the study addressed some ethical concerns, which included 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.

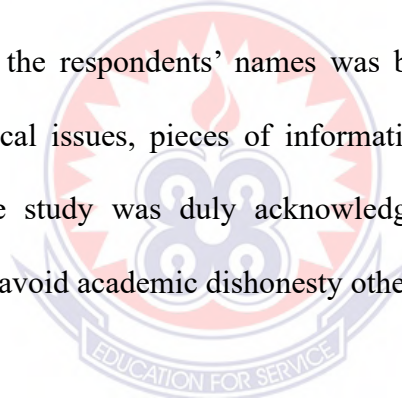
#### **Anonymity**

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 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 plagiarism.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data based on the research questions of the study. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (Means-M, and Standard Deviations-Std.D). The first part of this chapter describes the demographic characteristics of the teachers selected for the study. In the second part, the research findings are presented based on the research questions formulated for the study.

#### 4.1 Demographic Description of Respondents

This section on the questionnaire (Biographical) discusses the background information of the respondents. These include the respondents' gender, age, qualification, and years of teaching experience. Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents and their biographical information.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	12	13.5
	Female	77	86.5
<b>Age Range/Years</b>	20 – 30	21	23.6
	31 – 40	37	41.6
	41 – 50	17	19
	51 – 60	14	15.8
<b>Qualification</b>	Diploma	32	36
	Degree	43	48.3
	Masters	14	15.7
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	1 – 5 years	19	21.4
	6 – 10 years	44	49.4
	11 years and above	26	29.2

**Field Data, 2025**

Table 1 represents the demographic data gathered for the study reflects important characteristics of the participants involved. The teaching workforce is overwhelmingly female, with 86.5% of respondents identifying as women, compared to just 13.5% who are male. This indicates that the early childhood education sector is predominantly occupied by women, a trend consistent with global patterns in early childhood teaching professions.

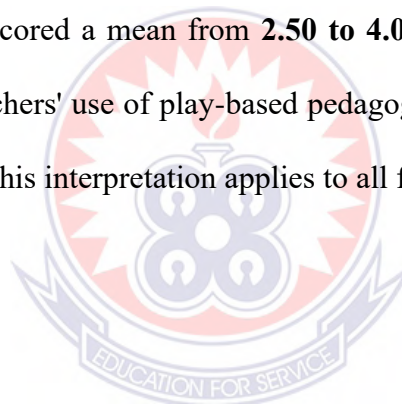
In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants fall within the 31 to 40-year age range, accounting for 41.6% of the total sample. This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents are in the mid-phase of their careers. Participants aged 20 to 30 years make up 23.6%, reflecting a fair representation of younger teachers who may be relatively new to the profession. Those aged 41 to 50 years constitute 19%, while 15.8% fall within the 51 to 60-year age bracket, indicating that experienced and potentially nearing-retirement teachers are also represented.

Concerning academic qualifications, most of the respondents hold a first degree (48.3%), followed by 36% with diploma qualifications and 15.7% with master's degrees. This shows that the majority of teachers are academically prepared, although there is still room for advancement to higher academic qualifications such as postgraduate studies.

The data on teaching experience reveals that almost half of the respondents (49.4%) have between 6 to 10 years of experience, indicating a strong core of professionals who have spent a substantial period in the field. A further 29.2% have been teaching for over 11 years, reflecting a solid base of highly experienced educators. Meanwhile, 21.4% of respondents have between 1 to 5 years of teaching experience, suggesting that there is a steady entry of new teachers into the profession.

## 4.2 Analysis of the Research Questions

To gather evidence for the study, the selected kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District were asked to rate their responses using Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Using means, the scales were scored as (Strongly Agree =4, Agree =3, Disagree =2, and Strongly Disagree =1). The criterion value of 2.50 was established for the scale. To obtain the criterion value (CV=2.50), the scores were added together and divided by the number scale ( $4+3+2+1= 10/4=2.50$ ). To understand the mean scores, items/statements on the views that scored a mean of **0.00 to 2.49** were regarded as low views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District. Those items/statements that scored a mean from **2.50 to 4.00** were regarded as high views contributing to the teachers' use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District. This interpretation applies to all four (4) research questions.



### 4.3 Research Question One:

What are the views of kindergarten teachers regarding the use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District?

**Table 4.2: Kindergarten Teachers' Views Regarding the Use of Play-based Pedagogy**

S/N	ITEMS	Means	Std
5	I see Play-based pedagogy as essential for promoting the cognitive development of young children	3.89	.174
6	I feel well-prepared and confident to implement play-based activities in my classroom.	3.71	.924
7	I believe that children learn best through hands-on play rather than structured academic tasks.	3.69	.235
8	I believe Play-based pedagogy supports children's emotional and social development as much as their cognitive skills.	3.62	.249
9	I face pressure from parents or administrators to prioritize academic learning over play-based activities.	3.58	.345
10	To me, play-based pedagogy is an effective way to meet the learning outcomes specified in the national curriculum.	3.39	.364
11	The lack of resources in my classroom makes it difficult to implement play-based pedagogy effectively.	3.32	.501
12	I see Play-based pedagogy as the primary teaching method used in early childhood education settings.	3.73	.217
13	Play-based pedagogy allows children to learn at their own pace and in their own way.	3.83	.206
14	I believe that incorporating play into the curriculum can help children develop essential skills like problem-solving and creativity.	3.78	.214
Means of means		3.65	.342

**Source: Field data 2025**

Table 4.2 presents analysis of kindergarten teachers' views on the use of play-based pedagogy reveals a generally positive perception, as reflected in the overall mean of means score of 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.342. This suggests that, on average, teachers agree with the benefits and effectiveness of play-based pedagogy, though there is some variation in individual responses.

Teachers overwhelmingly recognized the importance of play-based learning in cognitive development, as shown by the highest mean score of 3.89 and the lowest

standard deviation of 0.174. This indicates a strong and consistent belief among the respondents that play-based pedagogy is vital for young children's intellectual growth.

Teachers also expressed high levels of agreement that play-based pedagogy allows children to learn at their own pace and in their own way ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 0.206$ ) and that it promotes the development of essential skills such as problem-solving and creativity ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.214$ ). These responses emphasize the perceived role of play in fostering both independent learning and critical thinking.

In terms of implementation, most teachers felt confident and prepared to carry out play-based activities in their classrooms ( $M = 3.71$ ), although the relatively high standard deviation (0.924) suggests considerable variation, possibly due to differing levels of training or experience. Similarly, many teachers viewed play-based pedagogy as the main teaching method in early childhood settings ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.217$ ) and believed that hands-on play is more effective than structured academic tasks ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.235$ ).

Teachers also acknowledged the broader developmental benefits of play-based approaches. They agreed that play supports children's emotional and social development as much as their cognitive development ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.249$ ), indicating an appreciation for the holistic value of play in early learning.

Despite these positive perspectives, certain challenges were identified. Many teachers reported facing pressure from parents and administrators to focus on academic learning over play-based methods ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 0.345$ ). This external pressure may hinder the full implementation of child-centered pedagogical strategies. Additionally, teachers noted that while play-based pedagogy can align with national curriculum

outcomes, this connection is not always clear or easy to achieve ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.364$ ).

Resource limitations were another concern, with a mean of 3.32 and the highest standard deviation of 0.501. This wide variation suggests that while some classrooms may be adequately resourced, others struggle significantly, affecting the feasibility of consistent play-based implementation. In summary, kindergarten teachers strongly endorse the principles and benefits of play-based pedagogy, particularly in terms of promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development.

#### 4.3.1 Qualitative Analysis

##### **Theme 1: Suitable for a Child-centered Approach**

This theme highlights how play-based pedagogy recognizes that young children learn best when they are actively engaged, curious, and able to explore concepts at their own pace. It allows children to take ownership of their learning experiences, making education more meaningful and developmentally appropriate. Here are some excerpts from the interview

One teachers noted:

*Play-based learning gives children the freedom to express themselves and learn through what interests them. It's not forced, so they enjoy the process more. T4*

Another teachers emphasized:

*This approach respects the nature of children. They learn best when they are doing, touching, playing not just sitting and listening. T6*

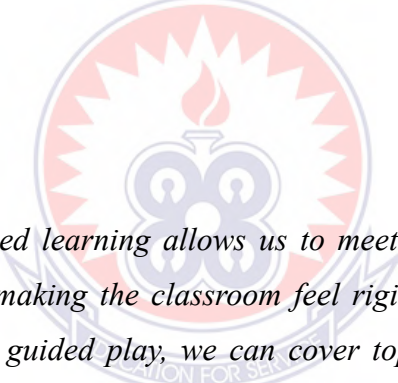
The quotes imply that teachers recognize play-based learning as a natural and effective way for young children to learn. They believe it promotes self-expression,

engagement, and enjoyment, which are crucial for holistic development. The approach supports active participation and aligns with children's developmental needs, emphasizing that meaningful learning occurs through hands-on experiences rather than passive listening. This reinforces the value of child-centered pedagogy in early education.

## **Theme 2: Aligns with Curriculum Goals**

Teachers highlighted that play-based pedagogy not only fosters holistic development in learners but also aligns closely with the objectives of the national kindergarten curriculum. They noted that play activities can be intentionally structured to achieve specific learning outcomes, making play a purposeful and effective instructional strategy.

One teacher explained:



*Play-based learning allows us to meet curriculum targets without making the classroom feel rigid or overly formal. Through guided play, we can cover topics like numeracy, literacy, and even science in a way that children enjoy and understand. It blends the joy of learning with clear educational goals. T2*

Another emphasized:

*The curriculum encourages active learning, and play-based methods are one of the best ways to achieve this. When children are engaged in purposeful play, they explore concepts deeply and naturally. This approach makes it easier to integrate curriculum goals with everyday classroom activities. T9*

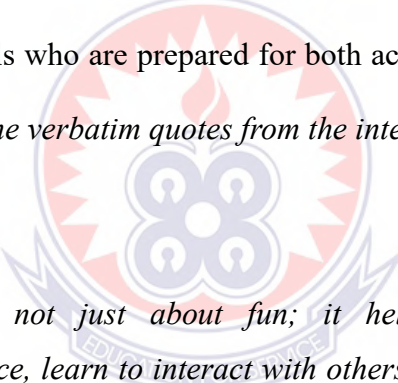
The quotes imply that teachers view play-based pedagogy as a practical and effective method for achieving curriculum goals in a child-friendly manner. They believe it

transforms traditional learning into engaging experiences, allowing children to explore academic concepts through meaningful play. This suggests that play-based learning supports both enjoyment and academic achievement, making it a valuable approach for delivering the curriculum in early childhood education settings.

### **Theme 3: Fosters Holistic Development**

In exploring the teachers' views on play-based pedagogy, a recurring theme that emerged was its role in fostering the holistic development of young learners. Teachers consistently emphasized that play-based learning is not only beneficial for cognitive growth but also plays a crucial role in nurturing children's emotional, social, and physical development. According to the data, teachers believe that play helps create well-rounded individuals who are prepared for both academic challenges and real-life situations. Here are some verbatim quotes from the interview

*One teacher noted:*



*Play is not just about fun; it helps children build confidence, learn to interact with others, and manage their emotions. It shapes the whole child, not just their academic side. I've seen firsthand that children who struggle with social skills or emotional control can express themselves more freely through play. It's a form of learning that doesn't just focus on the mind but develops the heart and spirit as well. T8*

*Another teachers shared:*

*Through play, children develop skills like patience, teamwork, and problem-solving. These are life skills they carry beyond the classroom. It's not just about the academic content but how they interact with each other, how they resolve conflicts, and how they learn to*

*collaborate and compromise. These experiences are invaluable and are more directly learned through play than through sitting at a desk. T7*

A third teachers elaborated:

*When children play, they engage their minds and bodies. It supports their language, motor skills, and even their ability to express feelings. That's real learning. Play helps children develop coordination, language skills, and the ability to understand and articulate their feelings, which are fundamental for their overall growth and learning. T6*

These quotes highlight the profound impact of play-based pedagogy on holistic child development. Teachers emphasize that play fosters not only academic learning but also emotional, social, and physical growth. Through play, children build essential life skills such as confidence, patience, teamwork, and problem-solving. It supports language development, motor skills, and emotional expression. The implication is that play-based pedagogy is essential for nurturing well-rounded, emotionally intelligent, and socially capable individuals, laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

#### 4.4 Research Question Two:

What is type of training that kindergarten teachers have in the use of play for teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District?

**Table 4.3: The Types of Training of Teachers in the Use of Play**

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Std
15	I received formal training in using play as a teaching strategy during my teacher education.	3.14	.517
16	My pre-service training prepared me well to use play effectively in the classroom.	3.32	.457
17	I have attended in-service training or workshops on play-based learning in the past two years.	3.27	.419
18	I feel confident using different types of play activities in my teaching because of my training.	3.42	.384
19	My training included practical examples of how to use play to achieve learning objectives.	3.34	.182
20	I have received guidance on how to link play to the Standard-Based Curriculum.	3.12	.624
21	I regularly receive support or coaching on play-based teaching methods from school or district officials.	2.98	.882
22	I have had opportunities to learn from other teachers who use play effectively.	3.56	.346
23	My training helped me understand how play supports children's holistic development.	3.48	.171
	Mean of Means	3.29	.442

**Source: Field data, 2025**

The analysis of the data presented in Table 4.3 on the level of training that kindergarten teachers have in the use of play for teaching and learning in the Ho West District reveals a moderate level of preparedness, with some areas showing strength and others highlighting significant gaps. The overall mean score across all items is 3.29, with a standard deviation of 0.442, indicating that, on average, teachers moderately agree that they have received training related to play-based pedagogy, though there is some variability in their responses.

Item 22 (“*I have had opportunities to learn from other teachers who use play effectively*”) recorded the highest mean score of 3.56 with a standard deviation of

0.346. This suggests that peer learning plays an important role in teacher development in this area and that many teachers have informally benefitted from collegial knowledge-sharing. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a consistent pattern of agreement among respondents.

Similarly, item 23, which states *“My training helped me understand how play supports children’s holistic development,”* had a high mean of 3.48 and a very low standard deviation of 0.171, showing that most teachers strongly agree and have a shared understanding of the developmental importance of play, likely due to its emphasis during teacher training or practice.

Item 18 (*“I feel confident using different types of play activities in my teaching because of my training”*) also received a high mean of 3.42 (SD = 0.384), reflecting a general sense of self-efficacy among teachers concerning play-based instruction. This suggests that even if formal structures are limited, many teachers still feel equipped to implement play in their classrooms.

Conversely, the lowest mean score was recorded for item 21 (*“I regularly receive support or coaching on play-based teaching methods from school or district officials”*), with a mean of 2.98 and the highest standard deviation of 0.882. This indicates not only limited formal support structures from education authorities but also a wide disparity in teachers’ experiences some may have received occasional support, while others have had none at all.

Item 20 (*“I have received guidance on how to link play to the Standards-Based Curriculum”*) also scored relatively low, with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.624, pointing to a notable gap in training content and follow-up. This suggests

that teachers are not consistently trained or guided in aligning play with curriculum goals, which may undermine effective implementation.

On the other hand, item 16, which refers to *pre-service preparation* for play-based instruction, received a mean of 3.32 (SD = 0.457), and item 26, regarding *in-service training*, scored 3.27 (SD = 0.419). These figures suggest that both initial and ongoing training efforts are moderately present but not sufficiently robust or comprehensive.

Item 19 (“*My training included practical examples of how to use play to achieve learning objectives*”) had a mean of 3.34, but with a very low standard deviation of 0.182, indicating that while responses were consistent, the actual practical orientation of training might not have been detailed or extensive enough for most teachers to feel confident across various contexts.

Overall, while the mean of means (3.29) suggests that kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District have some foundational training in play-based pedagogy, the results point to several shortcomings especially in terms of ongoing professional development, practical application of training, and curriculum alignment support. The relatively small standard deviation across most items shows general agreement among teachers, which emphasizes the systemic nature of the training gaps rather than isolated cases. Addressing these issues through more targeted in-service training, practical workshops, and coaching could greatly enhance the effective integration of play in early childhood classrooms.

#### 4.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

##### Pre-Service Training in Play-Based Pedagogy

*A Teacher Echoed;*

*During my teacher training, we only touched briefly on using play in the classroom. It wasn't a major focus of the curriculum. We were told that play is important, but there wasn't much emphasis on how to actually use it to teach literacy or numeracy. So, when I started teaching, I had to figure most of it out through trial and error and by watching more experienced colleagues. T2*

*Another Added;*

*"I remember learning about play during my college days, but the training was mostly theoretical. We discussed the benefits of play, but we didn't get enough opportunities to practice or observe how it works in real classrooms. Honestly, most of what I do now with play-based activities comes from what I've learned on the job not from the pre-service training. T8*

These quotes suggest that pre-service training programs for kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District may lack sufficient depth and practical emphasis on play-based pedagogy. While play is introduced as a concept, a gap appears to exist between theoretical knowledge and its practical application. As a result, teachers enter the workforce underprepared to effectively implement play in teaching and learning. This highlights the need to strengthen teacher education curricula by incorporating hands-on experiences, classroom simulations, and practicum-based exposure to play-based methods, ensuring that teachers are better equipped to use play as an intentional and structured pedagogical tool.

## **In-Service and Continuous Professional Development**

*A teacher said;*

*Since I started teaching, I've only attended one workshop on play-based learning, and that was organized by an NGO, not the education office. Most of our training focuses on general teaching, not specifically on how to use play to teach subjects. I wish there were more targeted in-service training to help us understand how to structure play to meet curriculum goals. T7*

*Another added;*

*"We rarely receive refresher training on how to use play in our lessons. Sometimes, you hear about workshops, but they are held far away or during school hours, so many of us can't attend. Without regular updates, it's hard to improve or learn new strategies for using play effectively in the classroom. T5*

These quotes indicate that in-service and continuous professional development opportunities related to play-based teaching are limited, inconsistent, and often inaccessible for kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District. Training is either too general or poorly timed, making it difficult for teachers to enhance their skills or stay updated with effective play-based strategies. This lack of structured and sustained support hinders the professional growth of teachers and limits their ability to use play as an intentional instructional tool. There is a clear need for more frequent, targeted, and accessible training programs to build teacher capacity in play-based pedagogy.

## **Institutional and Systemic Support for Teacher Training**

*A teacher said;*

*Our school tries its best, but there's not much support from the district level when it comes to training in play-based learning. We don't get regular updates, materials, or guidance. Sometimes, we rely on each other to share ideas, but that can only go so far without proper institutional support. T1*

*Another emphasized*

*"There's a gap between what the curriculum expects and the kind of support we get. We are encouraged to use play, but no one provides us with the tools or training we need to do it well. If the system truly values play, then there should be more structured support from education authorities. T3*

These quotes highlight a significant disconnect between curriculum expectations and the systemic support provided to kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District. While teachers are encouraged to use play-based methods, the lack of structured institutional support such as regular training, provision of materials, and technical guidance limits their ability to implement these methods effectively. Relying on peer support alone is insufficient to meet the demands of a play-based curriculum. These findings suggest that for play-based pedagogy to succeed, education authorities must invest in coordinated, ongoing support systems that prioritize teacher capacity building and resource provision at the school and district levels.

#### 4.5 Research Question Three:

What teaching and learning resources are available to support the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?

**Table 4.4: Teaching and Learning Resources Available to Support the Use of Play in Teaching and Learning Activities**

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Std
24	My classroom has enough play materials (e.g., blocks, puzzles, toys) to support learning activities.	2.87	.920
25	I have access to teaching aids that help me incorporate play into lessons (e.g., storybooks, charts, role-play materials).	2.92	.695
26	The outdoor play area in my school is well-equipped with resources for physical play (e.g., swings, slides, climbing frames).	2.63	.983
27	I receive regular supplies or materials from the Ghana Education Service or school management to support play-based learning.	2.37	1.234
28	There are designated learning/play centres (e.g., literacy corner, numeracy area) in my classroom.	3.13	.627
29	I improvised play materials that support classroom learning.	3.52	.824
30	My school has storage space and facilities to keep play resources in good condition.	2.29	.582
31	I adapt learning materials to suit play-based activities with the resources I have.	2.95	.746
32	The resources available in my school encourage creativity and hands-on exploration among learners.	3.02	.520
	Mean of Means	2.86	.791

**Source: Field data, 2025**

The analysis of Table 4.4 reveals a generally low to moderate availability of teaching and learning resources that support the use of play in kindergarten classrooms within the Ho West District. The overall mean score is 2.86 with a standard deviation of 0.791, indicating that while some resources are available, they are not consistently or adequately provided across schools. The variability in standard deviation also suggests a wide disparity in resource availability between different kindergarten centres.

The item with the highest mean score was item 29 (*“I improvised play materials that support classroom learning”*), which recorded a mean of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 0.824. This suggests that many teachers actively create their own materials, demonstrating initiative and adaptability in the absence of adequate formal supplies. However, the relatively high standard deviation indicates differing levels of improvisation across classrooms some teachers may be highly resourceful, while others struggle.

Item 28 (*“There are designated learning/play centres in my classroom”*) also scored relatively high with a mean of 3.13 (SD = 0.627), showing that some classrooms are structured to support varied play-based activities. This reflects some alignment with best practices in early childhood pedagogy, although the moderate score suggests room for improvement in how widespread or well-equipped these centres are.

On the other hand, the lowest mean score was observed in item 30 (*“My school has storage space and facilities to keep play resources in good condition”*) with a mean of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 0.582. This points to a significant infrastructure gap, with most teachers lacking basic facilities to maintain or preserve play materials, which can compromise both the quality and durability of available resources.

Item 27 (*“I receive regular supplies or materials from the Ghana Education Service or school management to support play-based learning”*) was also notably low at a mean of 2.37 (SD = 1.234). The high standard deviation reflects major inconsistencies in the distribution or provision of materials by official channels. Some schools may receive occasional supplies, while others receive none at all.

Item 26 (“*The outdoor play area in my school is well-equipped*”) also had a low mean of 2.63 with a standard deviation of 0.983, highlighting that outdoor physical play resources are largely inadequate or unevenly distributed across schools. This is particularly concerning given the importance of gross motor development and physical exploration in early childhood education.

Moderate scores were recorded for items 34, 35, and 41, which measured access to basic play materials, teaching aids, and adaptation of learning materials. For instance, item 25 (“*I have access to teaching aids...*”) had a mean of 2.92 (SD = 0.695), indicating some presence of relevant aids, but not in sufficient quantity or variety to fully support play-based learning. Similarly, item 31 (“*I adapt learning materials...*”) had a mean of 2.95 (SD = 0.746), suggesting that while teachers are trying to adjust available resources, these efforts are still limited by the quantity and quality of materials available.

Item 32 (“*The resources available encourage creativity and hands-on exploration*”) had a moderate mean of 3.02 with a low standard deviation of 0.520, indicating a shared perception that existing materials support creative learning to some extent but again, not to an optimal level.

#### **4.5.1 Qualitative Analysis**

##### **Theme 1: Availability of Age-Appropriate Play Materials**

*A teacher mentioned that;*

*We do have some toys and learning materials in the classroom, but many of them aren't suitable for the children's age or developmental level. Some toys are meant for older kids, and others are so old or damaged that they can't be used effectively. As a result, the children often get*

*bored or frustrated instead of being excited to learn through play. T2*

*Another supported her claim by saying;*

*A lot of the materials we use come from donations, which we're grateful for, but they're not always helpful. Sometimes the items don't match what we're teaching or aren't safe or engaging for our age group. We need materials that are not just available, but also aligned with the curriculum and appropriate for hands-on learning with young children. T5*

*Another added;*

*"In our centre, we lack even the basic materials like building blocks, storybooks, or shape sorters that are essential for play-based learning. We try to improvise using local materials, but it's not the same. The children miss out on important learning experiences, especially those that require specific tools for developing early literacy and numeracy skills. T3*

These quotes reflect a significant gap in the availability and suitability of play materials in kindergarten centres. Even where materials exist, they are often outdated, developmentally inappropriate, or misaligned with curriculum goals. This severely limits children's opportunities to engage in meaningful, guided play that supports their cognitive and social development. The situation calls for intentional investment in age-appropriate, curriculum-aligned play resources to enhance learning outcomes in early childhood education settings.

## **Theme 2: Condition and insufficiency of Play Resources**

*Teacher 6 said;*

*Most of the play materials we have are old and worn out. Some puzzles are missing pieces, and many of the toys are broken. We keep using them because we don't have replacements, but they don't serve their purpose anymore.*  
T6

*Teacher 5 added that;*

*"We simply don't have enough materials for all the children. If I bring out building blocks, only a few learners can use them at a time, while the rest have to wait or do something else. It makes it hard to involve everyone in meaningful play."* T5

These quotes reveal that many kindergarten centres face serious shortages in both the quantity and condition of play-based resources. Damaged or insufficient materials limit active participation, reduce instructional quality, and prevent equitable access to hands-on learning. The situation undermines the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy and suggests an urgent need for timely provision, replenishment, and maintenance of teaching and learning resources to support inclusive and engaging classroom environments.

## **Theme 3: Teacher-Made and Improvised Teaching Aids**

*A teacher said;*

*Because we don't receive enough teaching materials, I often have to create my own using cardboard, bottle tops, and other local items. It takes time, but it's the only way to give the children something practical to use during lessons.*  
T2

*Teacher 5 supported the above when she said;*

*Most of the play materials in my classroom are handmade. I use old boxes to create puzzles and draw flashcards myself. It's not perfect, but the children enjoy them and it keeps the learning going. T5*

These quotes show that due to a lack of adequate official resources, teachers in the Ho West District rely heavily on improvisation and creativity to provide play-based materials. While this demonstrates dedication and resourcefulness, it also reveals systemic inadequacies in the supply of standardized teaching and learning resources. Without proper institutional support, teachers are burdened with the additional task of material creation, which can affect time for instruction and planning. This highlights the need for structured support in providing adequate materials and training on how to supplement them effectively with locally sourced aids.

#### **Theme 4: Support from School Leadership and Education Authorities**

*A teacher said;*

*Our headteacher is supportive, but there's not much they can do because the school doesn't receive specific funds for play materials. Most of the time, we're told to manage with what we have, even when the materials are clearly inadequate. T1*

*Another emphasized;*

*"We rarely get visits or follow-ups from the district office regarding play-based learning. There's no real guidance or provision of resources from the education authorities, so it feels like play is not seen as a serious part of teaching. T7*

These quotes suggest that while some school leaders may be supportive in principle, there is limited structural or financial backing from both school management and

education authorities. The lack of targeted funding, professional guidance, and regular oversight on play-based teaching reflects a systemic undervaluing of play in early childhood education. This gap in institutional support hinders effective implementation of the curriculum and places the burden solely on teachers. To strengthen play-based learning, stronger leadership commitment and district-level policy action are needed to prioritize resources, training, and supervision.

#### 4.6 Research Question Four

How effective is the use of play by teachers in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?

**Table 4.5: Effectiveness of Play in Teaching and Learning**

S/N	ITEMS	Means	Std
33	I find that using play-based activities helps my learners understand lessons more easily.	3.72	.344
34	When I use play in my teaching, my learners are more active and engaged.	3.52	.813
35	In my classroom, play has helped learners become better at solving problems on their own.	3.42	.313
36	I have observed that play helps my learners communicate and work better with each other.	3.35	.141
37	From my experience, learners remember more of what I teach when play is involved.	3.18	.189
38	I am better able to achieve my lesson objectives when I include play in my teaching.	3.44	.360
39	I often use play activities to assess how well my learners are developing and learning.	3.84	.711
40	My learners show more interest in learning when I use play-based activities.	3.79	.454
41	The play activities I use fit well with the learning goals in the Standards-Based Curriculum.	3.62	.433
	Mean of Means	3.54	.417

#### Field data, 2025

Table 4.5 presents teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of play in teaching and learning, as reflected in their responses to nine statements. The analysis is based on the mean scores and standard deviations for each item. Overall, the results indicate a strong positive perception of play-based teaching among teachers, with all mean

values exceeding the criterion mean of 3.00. The overall mean of means of 3.54 suggests that teachers generally agree that play is an effective instructional approach in the classroom.

Item 33 recorded a high mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.344), indicating that most teachers agree that the use of play-based activities helps learners understand lessons more easily. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a high level of consistency in teachers' responses, implying shared experiences regarding the role of play in enhancing comprehension.

Similarly, Item 34 shows a mean score of 3.52 (SD = 0.813), indicating that teachers perceive learners to be more active and engaged when play is incorporated into teaching. Although the mean score is high, the relatively larger standard deviation suggests some variation in teachers' experiences, possibly due to differences in classroom context, learner characteristics, or the types of play activities used.

Item 35, which examined the role of play in promoting independent problem-solving, recorded a mean score of 3.42 (SD = 0.313). This indicates that teachers generally agree that play contributes to the development of learners' problem-solving skills. The low standard deviation reflects a strong consensus among respondents.

Item 36 assessed whether play enhances communication and collaboration among learners. It recorded a mean score of 3.35 (SD = 0.141), suggesting agreement among teachers that play supports social interaction and cooperative learning. The very low standard deviation indicates minimal variation in responses, highlighting a shared observation that play promotes teamwork and communication skills.

Item 37 recorded the lowest mean score of 3.18 (SD = 0.189), though it still exceeds the criterion mean. This suggests that teachers moderately agree that learners retain

more information when play is involved in teaching. While the perception is positive, the comparatively lower mean indicates that some teachers may experience challenges in linking play directly to long-term retention of lesson content.

Item 38, which focused on the achievement of lesson objectives through play, recorded a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 0.360). This implies that teachers believe play-based activities support effective lesson delivery and help them meet instructional goals. The moderate standard deviation indicates reasonable consistency in responses.

Item 39 recorded the highest mean score of 3.84 (SD = 0.711), indicating that teachers strongly agree that play activities are useful for assessing learners' development and learning. This finding suggests that play is not only viewed as a teaching strategy but also as an effective informal assessment tool. The higher standard deviation, however, suggests some variation in how frequently or effectively teachers use play for assessment purposes.

Item 40 also recorded a high mean score of 3.79 (SD = 0.454), showing strong agreement that learners demonstrate greater interest in learning when play-based activities are used. This supports the view that play increases motivation and positive attitudes toward learning.

Finally, Item 41 recorded a mean score of 3.62 (SD = 0.433), indicating that teachers agree that the play activities they use align well with the learning goals of the Standards-Based Curriculum. This suggests that teachers perceive play-based pedagogy as compatible with curriculum requirements rather than conflicting with them.

In summary, the overall findings from Table 4.5 demonstrate that teachers perceive play as an effective approach for enhancing understanding, engagement, problem-

solving, social interaction, assessment, and learner interest. The overall mean of 3.54 confirms that play-based teaching is widely regarded as a valuable instructional strategy that supports both teaching effectiveness and learner development.

#### 4.6.1 Qualitative Analysis

##### **Theme 1: Improved Learner Engagement and Participation**

*Teacher 4 responded;*

*Whenever I introduce a concept through play, I notice how naturally the children become involved. They're not just listening or watching, they're moving, talking, experimenting, and asking questions. It's as if the learning comes alive for them, and they don't even realize they're learning because they're so immersed in the activity (T4)*

*In agreement with the statement made by teacher 4 above, teacher 6 mentioned that;*

*Some of the best learning moments I've witnessed happen when children are given the freedom to explore through guided play. They take initiative, collaborate with their peers, and stay focused for longer periods. It's in those moments that I see their confidence grow, and they become active participants in their own (T6).*

The quotes highlight that play-based learning fosters active involvement and deepens children's engagement in educational activities. When teachers use play, learners become more attentive, curious, and confident. They participate willingly, interact with peers, and explore concepts through hands-on experiences, which enhances understanding and retention. These insights suggest that integrating play into teaching strategies is not only effective but essential in early childhood settings. It empowers children to take ownership of their learning, supports social interaction, and nurtures a

love for learning, critical foundations for long-term academic success and holistic development in young learners.

## **Theme 2: Improve Academic and Developmental Outcomes**

*This theme emerged when teacher 1 said;*

*Since I have been incorporating play-based activities into my lessons, I've seen remarkable improvements in the learners' ability to recognize letters, count objects, and express their ideas clearly. Their academic progress feels more natural and meaningful. T1*

*This is supported by the response from teacher 3, saying;*

*Play gives children the chance to develop essential life skills problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, while also helping them grasp foundational concepts in literacy and numeracy. It creates a balance between academic growth and overall child development. T3*

These quotes underscore the powerful impact of play-based learning on both academic and developmental outcomes in early childhood education. The first quote highlights how integrating play into lessons enhances foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and communication, making learning more engaging and effective. The second quote expands on this by emphasizing that play also cultivates critical life skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and communication. Together, they imply that play not only supports cognitive development but also promotes holistic growth, reinforcing the need for educators to adopt play as a core strategy in early learning environments.

### **Theme 3: Easy Achievement of Learning Objectives**

*Teacher two said;*

*I design play-based tasks with clear learning goals in mind, whether it's recognizing numbers, identifying colors, or forming simple sentences. What's remarkable is that by the end of each session, the children can demonstrate exactly what they've learned through their play. It's a fun, interactive, and effective way to meet educational targets without making the learning process feel rigid or forced. T2*

*This is confirmed by the response from teacher 7 when she said;*

*When I guide children through structured play activities, I notice they don't just enjoy themselves, they complete specific tasks that show real understanding. Whether it's grouping items by size, counting aloud, or retelling a story using props, they consistently show me they've grasped the core concepts we're focusing on. What constantly surprises me is how much children retain when they learn through play. Days or even weeks later, they'll use vocabulary we practiced, apply counting skills, or independently solve puzzles. It shows me that they're not just memorising, they're truly internalizing what they've learned, and that's when I know we've achieved the objectives of the lesson. T7*

The quotes highlight that play-based learning is an effective strategy for achieving specific educational goals in early childhood settings. Teachers observe that when learning objectives are embedded within purposeful play, children not only remain engaged but also demonstrate clear understanding and retention of concepts. This suggests that play enhances both comprehension and recall, allowing children to internalize lessons in meaningful ways. It also indicates that structured play can serve as a reliable tool for assessing learning outcomes. Overall, the integration of s

supports measurable academic progress while preserving a joyful and developmentally appropriate learning environment.

#### **Theme 4: Assessment through Play**

This theme highlights that kindergarten teachers evaluate children's learning in a natural, stress-free environment. It provides authentic insights into cognitive, language, and social development during meaningful, child-centered activities. Here are some excerpts from the interview;

*Teacher 6 said;*

*During play, I observe what each child can do without making them feel like they're being tested. Whether they're building with blocks, engaging in role-play, or using learning materials, I pay attention to how they think, communicate, and solve problems. These moments give me deep insight into their understanding, far beyond what a written test could reveal. T6*

*Teachers 2 emphasized that;*

*I use play activities intentionally to check if the children are meeting learning targets. When they sort objects, retell stories, or work together during pretend play, I'm able to assess their grasp of key concepts like classification, language development, and social skills. It allows me to gauge their progress in a way. T2*

These quotes emphasize that play serves as an effective and authentic form of assessment in early childhood education. Through careful observation of children's actions, speech, and interactions during play, teachers can gather valuable insights into learners' cognitive, social, and language development without relying on formal

testing. This approach allows for a more accurate and holistic understanding of each child's progress, strengths, and learning needs. The use of play as an assessment tool also creates a low-pressure environment, helping children demonstrate their abilities naturally and confidently, thereby supporting more responsive and individualized teaching strategies.

#### **4.7 Discussions**

##### **Teachers Views on the Use of Play**

The analysis of the data gathered from both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires reveals a multifaceted understanding of early childhood educators' perceptions and practices regarding play-based pedagogy in the Ghanaian context. The findings, situated within the broader literature, underscore a general acknowledgment among educators of the importance of play in early childhood education, but also expose significant gaps in knowledge, training, and implementation capacity.

The quantitative results showed that a majority of teachers agree that play-based learning is beneficial for holistic development, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. This is consistent with the literature, such as Aras (2016) and Lemay et al. (2016), who emphasize the pedagogical value of play in fostering active engagement and meaningful learning among young children. Similarly, the Ghanaian curriculum reforms, including the 2019 Standards-Based Curriculum, stress the use of play as a foundation for teaching and learning in early childhood settings. The data confirm that teachers are aware of this policy direction; however, the qualitative interviews revealed that this awareness does not always translate into effective practice.

Several teachers in the interviews admitted uncertainty about how to integrate play into their lessons, particularly in language and numeracy development. This reflects the concerns raised by Smith and Brown (2013), who found that teachers often struggle with operationalizing play-based strategies due to a lack of pedagogical clarity. In the current study, this struggle is exacerbated by systemic issues, such as the lack of in-service training and limited pre-service education on play-based methods, corroborating findings from Tamanja (2016) and Sofu et al. (2015). Quantitatively, a significant portion of respondents disagreed that their initial training sufficiently prepared them for using play as a pedagogical tool. This was further validated by qualitative comments pointing to a mismatch between theoretical coursework and the realities of overcrowded, under-resourced classrooms.

While many teachers expressed positive beliefs about play, their actual classroom practices remained largely teacher-directed. This disconnect aligns with the observations of Carter (2015) and Davis (2016), who argue that teacher attitudes are often shaped by external pressures, such as curriculum coverage requirements and parental expectations. The current data supports this, with several interviewees indicating that they feel compelled to prioritize academic benchmarks, thereby relegating play to a secondary status. This is consistent with findings by Singh and Patel (2022), who noted that educators under pressure to achieve academic results often perceive play as a non-essential activity.

Furthermore, the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings highlights the impact of contextual factors, such as class size, infrastructure, and availability of teaching and learning materials. Both data sets revealed that teachers in overcrowded and poorly resourced schools face significant challenges implementing play-based

approaches. For instance, quantitative data showed a high level of agreement among teachers that inadequate resources hinder effective teaching, and this was echoed in interviews, where participants described difficulty in facilitating meaningful play without appropriate materials. This confirms Johnson et al.'s (2022) assertion that physical and material constraints limit the practicality of play-based pedagogy.

Another theme emerging from the qualitative data is the influence of cultural perceptions of education. Teachers mentioned that some parents and community members view play as unproductive, which affects the level of support they receive. This resonates with the findings of Lee and Zhang (2021), who noted that in certain cultural settings, academic rigor is prioritized over developmental appropriateness, thereby discouraging the use of play as a legitimate instructional method.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate a willingness among educators to embrace play-based pedagogy if given the right support. Teachers interviewed expressed interest in professional learning communities (PLCs), in-service training, and collaborative planning, which they believe would enhance their confidence and competence in using play effectively. Quantitative data reinforced this sentiment, with a significant number of respondents agreeing that ongoing professional development would improve their ability to implement the curriculum as intended. These findings align with the literature, particularly Brown et al. (2022) and Green and Walker (2023), who emphasize the role of continuous learning and peer support in transforming teaching practices.

In conclusion, the study reveals a nuanced landscape of teacher perspectives and practices regarding play-based pedagogy. While there is a shared recognition of its value, effective implementation is constrained by limited training, resource

challenges, and cultural attitudes. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data underscores the need for comprehensive teacher preparation, sustained professional development, and systemic support to enable early childhood educators to fully realize the pedagogical potential of play in their classrooms.

### **The Types of Training of Teachers in the Use of Play**

The effective implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood education relies significantly on the level and quality of teacher preparation and continuous professional development. In the context of the Ho West District, the evidence from both quantitative and qualitative sources suggests that while teachers possess a foundational understanding of play-based approaches, their training, particularly in terms of practical application and ongoing support, is inconsistent and insufficiently robust to support sustained, curriculum-aligned implementation.

From the two datasets, teachers in the district generally acknowledge that they have been introduced to the principles of play-based learning during their pre-service training. However, this exposure tends to be largely theoretical, often lacking the hands-on experience or classroom simulations necessary to equip them with the confidence and skill to translate theory into practice. This aligns with findings from contemporary literature, which emphasize that effective teacher preparation should include not just conceptual knowledge, but also practical, scaffolded experiences that mirror real-world classroom challenges (Zosh et al., 2018; Whitebread et al., 2020).

A recurring pattern in the analysis indicates that practical training such as how to design and implement structured play activities to achieve specific learning outcomes is either inadequately addressed or entirely missing from teacher education programs. This gap between knowledge and practice has left many teachers to develop play-

based strategies through trial and error once they are already in the classroom. While this on-the-job learning demonstrates adaptability and initiative, it also reflects a systemic shortcoming in initial teacher education.

Beyond pre-service training, the availability and quality of in-service training and continuous professional development for kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District appear to be limited. Teachers report that professional development opportunities that focus specifically on play-based pedagogy are rare, often externally driven, and not integrated into regular capacity-building frameworks established by the education directorate or school leadership. When such opportunities do arise, they are sometimes inaccessible due to scheduling conflicts or logistical barriers, such as location or lack of funding for attendance. This lack of continuous and targeted training undermines efforts to sustain effective play-based teaching practices and leaves teachers without the support needed to evolve and refine their methods in line with changing curriculum demands or learner needs.

Furthermore, there is limited systemic support from school leadership and district education authorities in reinforcing play-based teaching. Teachers often operate in a professional vacuum concerning structured coaching, supervision, or feedback related to their use of play in the classroom. This disconnection between educational policy, which advocates for play as a core instructional method at the kindergarten level, and institutional practice suggests a need for stronger policy-practice coherence. According to research by Ndlovu, Okeke, and Nhase (2023), one of the key barriers to effective pedagogy in early childhood settings is the failure of education systems to provide teachers with the continuous, relevant support needed to implement child-centered methodologies.

One of the more promising findings is that teachers appear to be learning from one another through informal networks of peer support. Collaborative learning among colleagues, particularly in resource-constrained environments, plays a vital role in professional development. Teachers who lack access to formal training opportunities often rely on peer observation, shared lesson planning, and informal mentoring. While this practice promotes reflective teaching and knowledge exchange, it cannot replace the structured guidance and feedback provided through institutional support mechanisms. As Zosh et al. (2018) point out, while peer collaboration can enhance teacher efficacy, it must be complemented by formal professional development programs to ensure consistent quality across classrooms.

Another important observation is that, although teachers express a general confidence in using play in their teaching, there is limited emphasis on aligning these activities with the national curriculum. Play is often treated as an add-on rather than an integrated component of the instructional plan. This disconnection limits the effectiveness of play-based approaches and undermines their legitimacy within the formal learning structure. The literature is clear that for play to contribute meaningfully to educational outcomes, it must be explicitly linked to curriculum goals and learning standards (Fisher et al., 2019; Weisberg et al., 2016). When this alignment is lacking, the role of play in promoting literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies can become diluted or misinterpreted as merely recreational.

In terms of understanding the developmental value of play, teachers in the Ho West District appear to appreciate the broader benefits of play for holistic child development. They recognize that play contributes to children's social, cognitive, physical, and emotional growth. This conceptual understanding provides a strong

foundation for future professional development efforts, which can build on existing knowledge to enhance instructional design and classroom practices.

Despite these strengths, there is a noticeable lack of formal structures to guide teachers in applying what they know about child development to concrete teaching strategies through play. For example, there are few opportunities to practice integrating play into literacy instruction or to receive feedback on how well their play-based approaches meet learning objectives. Such gaps reflect a broader issue identified in regional and international research: that professional development in early childhood education often fails to move beyond basic awareness to foster pedagogical depth and intentionality (UNESCO, 2022; Broadhead, Howard & Wood, 2018).

Additionally, support from education authorities appears to be irregular and inconsistently distributed. While some teachers report occasional workshops or coaching sessions, others note that such interventions are rare or absent. This uneven access contributes to disparities in how confidently and effectively teachers can implement play-based methods. Addressing this issue requires a more systematic approach to capacity building one that includes regular training, mentoring, and monitoring mechanisms embedded within district-level education plans.

Finally, the absence of robust institutional support mechanisms limits the sustainability of teacher-led innovations and good practices. Even when teachers are motivated and knowledgeable, their efforts can be undermined by systemic constraints, such as lack of materials, overcrowded classrooms, and pressure to focus on academic outcomes through traditional methods. Therefore, any effort to improve

the level of training in play-based pedagogy must be coupled with broader reforms that address resource allocation, teacher workload, and curriculum flexibility.

In summary, the level of training that kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District have received in the use of play for teaching and learning is moderate but marked by important gaps. While teachers possess a basic understanding of play's value and express a willingness to use it in their classrooms, their ability to do so effectively is hindered by several systemic challenges. These include insufficient practical exposure during pre-service training, limited access to continuous professional development, weak institutional support, and inadequate alignment with the curriculum.

### **Teaching and Learning Resources Available to Support the Use of Play**

The analysis shows that availability and quality of teaching and learning resources play a pivotal role in the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood education. As highlighted in the literature, quality resources such as manipulatives, outdoor environments, structured play corners, and curriculum-aligned teaching aids create enabling conditions for young learners to engage in exploration, experimentation, and meaningful play (Zosh et al., 2018; NAEYC, 2022). In line with this, the study found that teachers in the Ho West District widely acknowledged the importance of such resources in facilitating child-centered learning.

However, a recurring theme in both the empirical data and supporting literature is the widespread reliance on improvised materials. Teachers frequently create learning aids using bottle tops, cardboard, pieces of cloth, and other locally available items. This practice, while commendable for its creativity and alignment with the cultural context, underscores a deeper issue chronic under-provision of formal resources. This aligns with studies that confirm that resource improvisation is a common strategy adopted by

educators in under-resourced settings (Perivoli Trust, 2021; Selepe et al., 2024). Nonetheless, this approach, though innovative, is often time-consuming and does not always meet the developmental needs of children effectively (Frimpong, 2021).

Also, the provision of structured play areas such as numeracy and literacy corners was also found to be inconsistent. While some classrooms had designated spaces for specific types of play, many lacked the materials or variety necessary to sustain engagement and support differentiated learning. This is consistent with findings from Aina and Bipath (2022) and Crowther et al. (2013), who observed that such spaces are beneficial when well-resourced and intentionally designed but are often limited in scope and variety in practice.

Moreover, outdoor play facilities remain particularly inadequate. The literature emphasizes the value of outdoor environments in supporting gross motor development, sensory exploration, and socio-emotional growth (Zosh et al., 2018; Embodied Cognition Review, 2018). Yet, many early childhood centres, particularly in low-income and peri-urban areas, lack safe and stimulating outdoor spaces such as climbing structures, gardens, or open fields (Clarkson et al., 2025). This lack not only limits children's physical development but also reduces opportunities for multisensory, risk-based learning.

Another pressing issue highlighted by both the data and existing research is the inconsistent supply of teaching and learning materials from district education offices and school management. Frimpong (2021) and Onyango et al. (2023) reported similar findings, with some schools receiving little to no resources. This inequitable distribution undermines the goals of inclusive and equitable early childhood education. Additionally, many classrooms lack basic infrastructure to store and

organize learning materials. Poor storage conditions often result in material damage and underutilization, a challenge that has also been identified in the works of Selepe et al. (2024) and Aina and Bipath (2022).

Despite these challenges, teachers noted that even with the limited available materials, some level of creativity and hands-on engagement among learners is encouraged. Open-ended resources, according to NAEYC (2022) and Zosh et al. (2018), are especially beneficial in stimulating inquiry-based learning and imaginative thinking. However, materials that are overly familiar or used repetitively lose their effectiveness over time, as also observed in studies by Mutindi et al. (2020) and Abebe & Keery (2023).

Crucially, while teacher improvisation is often necessary, the literature warns that it cannot substitute for structured, institutional support. Without consistent provision and maintenance of developmentally appropriate play materials, teacher-led solutions risk becoming unsustainable and may produce uneven learning experiences (Perivoli Trust, 2021; Frimpong, 2021). This challenge is further exacerbated by a mismatch between policy and practice. Although Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum places strong emphasis on play as a core instructional approach, the material and infrastructural support needed for its implementation is lacking in many settings (Meeuwissen et al., 2025; Ndlovu et al., 2023).

Comparative studies from across East and West Africa reveal similar constraints: systemic resource shortages, a lack of outdoor play infrastructure, and significant workload pressures on teachers who must bridge resource gaps with their own efforts (Mutindi et al., 2020; Abebe & Keery, 2023; Onyango et al., 2023). These challenges

not only strain educators but also result in significant inequities between well-resourced and under-resourced classrooms.

An encouraging trend emerging from both data and literature is the integration of culturally relevant materials into play-based learning. Teachers who incorporate local songs, indigenous games, counting rhymes, and oral storytelling not only engage children effectively but also strengthen learners' cultural identity and contextual understanding (African Storybook, 2023; Marfo & Biersteker, 2025). Research from Nigeria and Uganda similarly illustrates how traditional narratives and folk games can support the development of literacy, numeracy, and social cohesion (Okwany et al., 2011).

To address the resource challenges comprehensively, experts advocate for a blended strategy: one that combines systematic provision of standardized resource kits with continued support for teacher-led innovation. This should be accompanied by sustained investment in infrastructure and clear maintenance strategies. Furthermore, teacher training both pre-service and in-service should include modules on resource design, curriculum integration, and storage practices (Fisher et al., 2019; Van As & Excell, 2018; Aina & Bipath, 2022).

Policy and practice should converge through practical interventions such as distributing manipulatives and culturally appropriate story materials to all kindergartens, constructing outdoor play zones, installing storage units in classrooms, and establishing resource monitoring systems. Training teachers to develop, adapt, and sustain culturally and developmentally appropriate play resources can bridge current gaps and ensure equitable, engaging learning environments for all learners.

### **Effectiveness of Play in Teaching and Learning**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data offers rich insights into how kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District perceive and apply play in teaching and learning. The overall mean score of 3.54 from the quantitative data suggests a strong and shared belief in the effectiveness of play-based approaches, a finding well-aligned with current scholarship advocating for child-centered, activity-based pedagogies (Pyle & Alaca, 2018; Weisberg et al., 2016).

One of the most prominent areas of convergence between the datasets is in relation to learner engagement and participation. The quantitative item that states, “*My learners show more interest in learning when I use play-based activities*” received a high mean of 3.79, and another, “*When I use play in my teaching, my learners are more active and engaged,*” had a mean of 3.52. These results correlate closely with the qualitative narratives, where teachers emphasized that play transforms learning into an immersive experience. For instance, Teacher T4 shared that “*learning comes alive*” when concepts are introduced through play, and T6 observed that learners “*stay focused for longer periods*”. These experiences support claims in the literature that play stimulates attention, motivation, and a positive emotional climate for learning (Zosh et al., 2018; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020).

Similarly, the theme assessment through play presents another clear point of convergence. Item 39, “*I often use play activities to assess how well my learners are developing and learning,*” had the highest mean score of 3.84. This aligns with teachers’ accounts of how observation during play provides authentic assessments of children’s cognitive and social development. Teacher T2 mentioned using activities like sorting and storytelling to evaluate understanding, which reflects Forman and

Fyfe's (2012) findings that observational assessment during play yields richer data than formal testing. In both the data and the literature, play is shown to facilitate formative, contextualized, and child-friendly assessment strategies, especially suitable for young learners (Pyle et al., 2020).

Another converging point is the alignment of play-based activities with curriculum goals. Item 41, which examined how well play fits the Standards-Based Curriculum, had a mean of 3.62, showing teachers generally agree that play is compatible with expected learning outcomes. Qualitative data confirmed this, with Teacher T2 stating that play-based activities are “designed with clear learning goals” and that learners demonstrate those objectives during play. This resonates with research suggesting that guided play where learning outcomes are intentionally embedded leads to better curriculum alignment (Weisberg et al., 2016; Pyle & Alaca, 2018). Ghana's own curriculum guidelines (NaCCA, 2019) endorse play-based strategies as essential for effective early learning, further validating these perceptions.

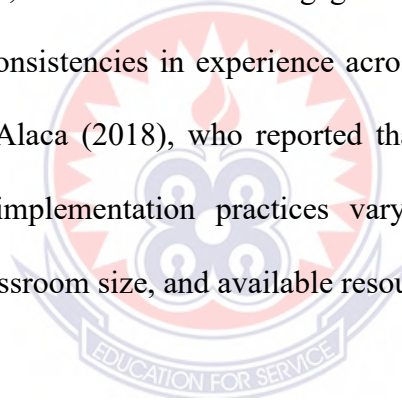
Additionally, academic and developmental outcomes emerged as a theme supported across both datasets. Quantitatively, items such as *“Play helps learners understand lessons more easily”* (Mean = 3.72) and *“I am better able to achieve my lesson objectives when I include play”* (Mean = 3.44) reinforce teachers' belief in play's instructional value. Teacher T1 and T3 highlighted similar outcomes, emphasizing gains in literacy, numeracy, communication, and problem-solving through play. This dual support mirrors scholarly evidence that play enhances both cognitive development and soft skills like communication and collaboration (UNICEF, 2018; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020).

However, some areas of divergence between the quantitative and qualitative data also emerged and warrant deeper reflection. A notable example is Item 37, which states, “*From my experience, learners remember more of what I teach when play is involved*”, and scored the lowest mean of 3.18. While this still suggests moderate agreement, it reveals a degree of hesitation among some teachers. Interestingly, this contrasts with qualitative data, particularly from Teacher T7, who noted that learners “*apply vocabulary weeks later*” and “*retain what they learn through play.*” The literature supports T7’s perspective: researchers like Zosh et al. (2018) and Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2020) emphasize that the multisensory and emotionally engaging nature of play supports memory retention more effectively than rote methods. The divergence here could stem from differences in teacher training or their ability to explicitly track retention over time, suggesting a potential area for professional development.

A second area of divergence involves peer collaboration and communication, represented by Item 36 (“*Play helps my learners communicate and work better with each other*”), which had a relatively low mean of 3.35. This appears inconsistent with qualitative responses, particularly from Teacher T3, who stated that play nurtures “*teamwork and communication.*” The literature confirms that social play encourages negotiation, turn-taking, and empathy (Zinsser et al., 2019), all of which are foundational for social-emotional learning. The lower rating in the quantitative data may reflect that while teachers recognize these benefits in theory, they may find it harder to observe or quantify peer interaction during play. Alternatively, it may indicate that in some classrooms, play is implemented more individually or without intentional peer engagement strategies.

Another mildly divergent area is seen in Item 35, focused on learners' problem-solving skills (Mean = 3.42). While teachers like T3 mentioned that play facilitates problem-solving, the score suggests a slightly less unanimous view on this outcome. Literature such as Weisberg et al. (2016) and Whitebread et al. (2017) highlights that problem-solving often emerges in well-facilitated exploratory play. Thus, the divergence may point to variability in how effectively teachers structure and scaffold these opportunities, which again underscores the importance of targeted training in guided play and problem-solving pedagogy.

Finally, it's important to note the role of variability captured in the standard deviations. For instance, Item 34 on learner engagement had a high standard deviation (0.813), indicating inconsistencies in experience across classrooms. This aligns with findings by Pyle and Alaca (2018), who reported that while most teachers support play-based learning, implementation practices vary widely, often depending on teacher confidence, classroom size, and available resources.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Overview

This final chapter comprises a summary of the study, emphasizing the major findings. It discusses the summary of key findings, conclusion, recommendations as well as suggestions for further studies.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate kindergarten teachers use of play-based pedagogy in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. Examine the views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District
2. Find out the type of training of kindergarten teachers in the use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District.
3. To explore the teaching and learning resources available for the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District.
4. Assess the effectiveness of teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District.

The study employed the mixed-method approach with an explanatory sequential research design. The total population of the study was 89 kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers hold positive perceptions of play-based pedagogy, valuing its role in cognitive, social, and emotional development. Qualitative insights affirm its alignment with curriculum goals and capacity to foster holistic, child-centered, and meaningful learning experiences.

Findings show that kindergarten teachers possess basic knowledge of play-based pedagogy, but limited practical training, weak professional development, and inadequate institutional support restrict consistent implementation, despite reliance on informal peer learning and partial curriculum alignment.

The study again revealed that kindergarten teachers acknowledged the value of quality resources for play-based learning but often relied on improvised materials due to poor supply and infrastructure. Inadequate outdoor spaces, irregular provision, and limited storage hindered effective use, though open-ended and culturally relevant materials fostered creativity and learner engagement.

The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers view play as effective in enhancing learner engagement, achieving learning objectives, and supporting assessment. However, slight variations exist in their perceptions of play's impact on memory retention, collaboration, and problem-solving among learners.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

The following conclusions were drawn from the study;

The study concludes that play-based pedagogy holds great potential for enriching early childhood education, despite existing barriers. A sustained investment in resources, teacher training, and community sensitization is essential to fully harness

its benefits and create engaging, developmentally appropriate learning environments for young children.

The study concludes that while kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District have a basic understanding of play-based teaching, they often struggle to apply it effectively due to limited hands-on training, ongoing professional development, and institutional support. Strengthening these areas is essential for meaningful and consistent use of play in the classroom.

The study concludes that while kindergarten teachers recognize the importance of quality resources for play-based learning, they are often left to depend on improvised materials due to inconsistent supply, limited infrastructure, and lack of proper storage. Despite these challenges, the use of open-ended and culturally familiar materials has helped promote creativity and active engagement among learners, highlighting teachers' resilience and commitment to making play meaningful even in resource-constrained environments.

The study concludes that while kindergarten teachers recognize play as valuable for engagement and learning, differences in perceptions of its cognitive and collaborative benefits highlight the need for targeted training to enhance consistent and holistic integration of play in early childhood education.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made from the study;

1. It is recommended that education authorities in the Ho West District sustain and strengthen the integration of play-based pedagogy by providing continuous professional development, adequate resources, and supportive

policies to enhance its effective implementation and reinforce its alignment with curriculum goals for holistic, child-centered learning experiences.

2. Again, the study recommends that kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District should be provided with regular, hands-on professional development opportunities that focus on practical strategies for implementing play-based learning. This should include workshops, classroom demonstrations, and peer mentoring sessions to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
3. The District Education Service and school authorities in the Ho West District should ensure a consistent supply of age-appropriate and curriculum-aligned play materials. Investments should also be made in infrastructure such as safe outdoor play areas and adequate storage facilities to preserve learning resources.
4. The study recommends targeted capacity-building for kindergarten teachers in the Ho West District to deepen their understanding of how play supports memory, collaboration, and problem-solving. This should include practical training sessions and peer-learning opportunities that focus on subject-specific strategies for integrating different types of play into instruction.

### **5.5 Suggestion for Further Studies**

Further studies could explore the long-term impact of play-based pedagogy on children's developmental outcomes, focusing on cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Research could also investigate the influence of cultural factors on teachers' attitudes toward play-based approaches, particularly in different regions of Ghana. Additionally, studies might assess the effectiveness of professional development programs and their influence on teachers' ability to implement play-based methods. Exploring the perspectives of parents, students, and administrators could provide a

more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and benefits of play-based pedagogy. Finally, future research could examine how various resource allocation strategies, including community involvement, can mitigate challenges such as insufficient materials and funding to support effective play-based teaching.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

#### **FACULTY OF APPLIED BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES IN EDUCATION**

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS**

#### **Dear Respondent**

The study of **kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District**. It would therefore be appreciated if you could provide responses to all items on the questionnaire, and do it honestly. You are assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity of all information provided. Nothing will ever be published or reported that will associate your name and/or school with your responses to the survey questions. Therefore, you should not write your name, and/or school name on any part of the instrument. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Again, questions on this survey instrument have gone through a thorough review by professionals at the University of Education, Winneba, and have been declared ethical for educational research. You hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study by responding to the items of the various sections of this instrument.

**Thank You.**

## SECTION A

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

#### 1. Gender:

a) Male [ ]

b) Female [ ]

#### 2. Age bracket

a) Below 30 [ ]

b) 31-35 [ ]

c) 35-40 [ ]

#### 3. Level of Qualification

a) Diploma [ ]

b) Degree [ ]

c) Masters [ ]

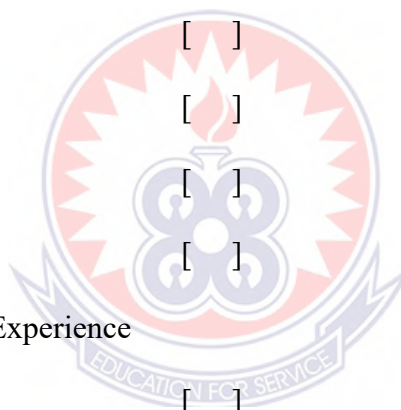
d) Others [ ]

#### 4. Years of Teaching Experience

a) 0-5years [ ]

b) 6-10years [ ]

c) 11 years and above [ ]



## SECTION B

### RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Please respond to the following statements on kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. Indicate the extent to which you Strongly Agree-SA, Agree-A, Disagree-D, and Strongly Disagree-SD to the statements below

**Directions:** Indicate with a tick [ ✓ ] on the influence of play-based pedagogy on early-grade learners' ability to comprehend texts.

Where: *SA = Strongly Agree, (4), A = Agree, (3) D = Disagree, (2) and SD = Strongly Disagree (1)*

**What are the views of kindergarten teachers regarding the use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District?**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
5	Play-based pedagogy is essential for promoting cognitive development of young children				
6	I feel well-prepared and confident to implement play-based activities in my classroom.				
7	I believe that children learn best through hands-on play rather than structured academic tasks.				
8	Play-based pedagogy supports children's emotional and social development as much as their cognitive skills.				
9	I face pressure from parents or administrators to prioritize academic learning over play-based activities.				
10	Play-based pedagogy is an effective way to meet the learning outcomes specified in the national curriculum.				
11	The lack of resources in my classroom makes it difficult to implement play-based pedagogy effectively.				
12	Play-based pedagogy should be the primary teaching method used in early childhood education settings.				
13	Play-based pedagogy allows children to learn at their own pace and in their own way.				
14	I believe that incorporating play into the curriculum can help children develop essential skills like problem-solving and creativity.				

**Research Question Two: What level of training do kindergarten teachers have in the use of play for teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District?**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
15	I received formal training in using play as a teaching strategy during my teacher education.				
16	My pre-service training prepared me well to use play effectively in the classroom.				
17	I have attended in-service training or workshops on play-based learning in the past two years.				
18	I feel confident using different types of play activities in my teaching because of my training.				
19	My training included practical examples of how to use play to achieve learning objectives.				
20	I have received guidance on how to link play to the Standard-Based Curriculum.				
21	I regularly receive support or coaching on play-based teaching methods from school or district officials.				
22	I have had opportunities to observe or learn from other teachers who use play effectively.				
23	My training helped me understand how play supports children's holistic development.				

**Research Question Three: What teaching and learning resources are available to support the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
24	My classroom has enough play materials (e.g., blocks, puzzles, toys) to support learning activities.				
25	I have access to teaching aids that help me incorporate play into lessons (e.g., storybooks, charts, role-play materials).				
26	The outdoor play area in my school is well-equipped with resources for physical play (e.g., swings, slides, climbing frames).				
27	I receive regular supplies or materials from the Ghana Education Service or school management to support play-based learning.				
28	There are designated learning/play centres (e.g., literacy corner, numeracy area) in my classroom.				
29	I improvised play materials that support classroom learning.				
30	My school has storage space and facilities to keep play resources in good condition.				
31	I adapt learning materials to suit play-based activities with the resources I have.				
32	The resources available in my school encourage creativity and hands-on exploration among learners.				

**Research Question Four: How effective is the use of play by teachers in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
33	I find that using play-based activities helps my learners understand lessons more easily.				
34	When I use play in my teaching, my learners are more active and engaged.				
35	In my classroom, play has helped learners become better at solving problems on their own.				
36	I have observed that play helps my learners communicate and work better with each other.				
37	From my experience, learners remember more of what I teach when play is involved.				
38	I am better able to achieve my lesson objectives when I include play in my teaching.				
39	I often use play activities to assess how well my learners are developing and learning.				
40	My learners show more interest in learning when I use play-based activities.				
41	The play activities I use fit well with the learning goals in the Standard-Based Curriculum.				

## **APPENDIX B**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

#### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS**

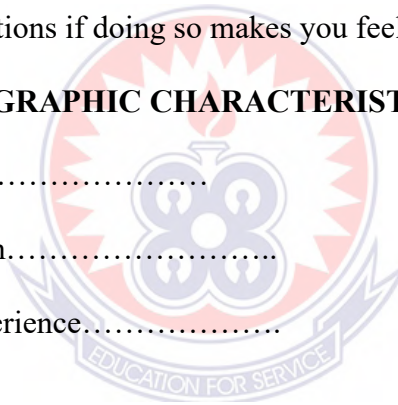
The purpose of this study was to investigate kindergarten teachers' use of play in teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. Your cooperation is appreciated in this study, which will enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of play-based pedagogy in kindergarten centres. Please be aware that participation is optional and that all information provided is for academic purposes and will be kept private. You have the option of not responding to any questions if doing so makes you feel uncomfortable. Thank you

#### **SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Gender.....

Education Qualification.....

Years of Teaching Experience.....



## SECTION A

**Objective 1: Find out the views of kindergarten teachers towards the use of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres in the Ho West District.**

1. How do you perceive the impact of play-based pedagogy on the development of kindergarten learners in your classroom?
2. Does play-based pedagogy suit the needs of learners in your classroom?
3. How do children respond to play-based activities compared to more structured learning methods?

**Objective 2: What level of training do kindergarten teachers have in the use of play for teaching and learning activities in the Ho West District?**

4. Can you describe the kind of training you received during your teacher education program regarding the use of play in teaching and learning?
5. Have you participated in any workshops or professional development sessions focused on play-based teaching? If yes, what were the key takeaways?
6. How confident do you feel in planning and using play-based strategies in your classroom, and what factors contribute to that confidence?
7. What kind of support or additional training do you feel you need to improve your use of play in your teaching practice?

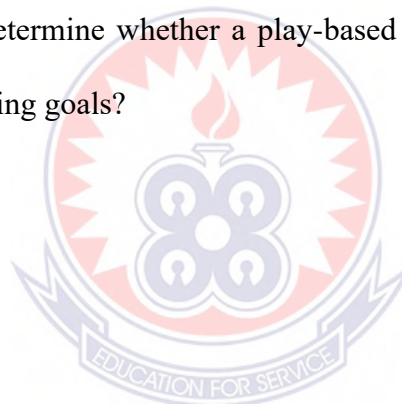
**Objective 3: What teaching and learning resources are available to support the use of play in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?**

8. What types of play and learning materials are currently available in your classroom?
9. How would you describe the condition and quantity of the play-based resources in your classroom?

10. Do you create or adapt any play materials yourself?
11. What kind of support do you receive from your school leadership or the education office in terms of acquiring or maintaining play-based teaching and learning resources?

**Objective 4: How effective is the use of play by teachers in teaching and learning activities in kindergarten centres in the Ho West District?**

12. How do your learners respond when you use play during lessons?
13. How effective has play been in helping you achieve your lesson objectives?
14. How does the use of play help you to meet curriculum standards when using play?
15. How do you determine whether a play-based activity has been successful in achieving learning goals?



## APPENDIX C

### INTRODUCTORY LETTER



FABSE/DECE/I.1

19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2025

The District Director  
Ghana Education Service  
P.O Box HP 1563  
Dzoloakpuita

Dear Sir/ Madam,

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I kindly write to introduce to you **Ms. Melody Sitsofe Amenya** with index number: **8241900024** who is an M. Phil student at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba. She is in her final year and has to embark on her thesis on the topic: *"Attitudes of Kindergarten Teachers Towards the Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy in the Ho-West District"*.

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

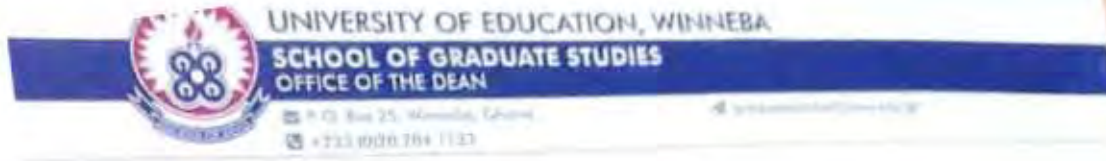
Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Subbey', is written over a circular stamp or watermark.

**PROF. MICHAEL SUBBEY, (PhD.)**  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

## APPENDIX D



Our Ref: SGS – 025/SF 2/ECDA/47

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2025

Ms. Melody Sitsafe Ameyia  
Department of Early Childhood Education  
University of Education,  
Winneba

Dear Ms. Ameyia,

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE

We are pleased to inform you that the Ethical Review Board has reviewed and approved your research proposal titled, *Attitude of Kindergarten Teachers Towards the Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy in the Ho West District of the Volta Region*. Your research has met the required ethical standards as stipulated by our institution.

### Approval Details:

- Research Title: Attitude of Kindergarten Teachers Towards the Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy in the Ho West District of the Volta Region
- Approval Date: 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2025
- Approval Number: SGS – EC – 47 – 25

Please, ensure that your research adheres to the ethical guidelines provided in your proposal throughout the study. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted for additional review.

We wish you success in your research endeavors. Should you have any questions or require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

  
PROF. A. K. AMOAKO-GYAMPAH (DLITT ET PHIL)  
FOR CHAIRMAN, IERB