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Early Childhood Education Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Play as a Teaching Technique in Afadjato South District of the Volta Region, Ghana

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Abstract

The study investigated the perception of early childhood educators on the use of play as a teaching technique in the Afadjato South District. The study was a cross-sectional descriptive design using concurrent triangulation mixed method approach. A sample of 120 participants was used comprising 100 kindergarten teachers, 10 basic school heads and 10 school supervisors. Purposive, simple random and convenience sampling techniques were used to select the participants. Questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data while thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data. The findings showed that early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District had positive perception on the use of play as a teaching technique. Kindergarten teachers' perception positively influenced their use of play as a teaching technique. Among other factors such as availability of play materials, the kind of motivation teachers received as teachers influenced the use of play as a technique of teaching. Teaching experiences were the most influential factors to kindergarten teachers' use of play as a teaching technique. It was concluded that early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District had good intentions on the use of play as a teaching technique. Also, kindergarten teachers' could use play as a teaching technique depending on their perception towards play. Moreover, factors that contributed to kindergarten teachers' use of play as a teaching technique were: availability of play materials, the kind of motivation teachers receive and their teaching experiences. It was recommended that through in-service training, head teachers should encourage early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District to continuously have positive perception towards play as a teaching technique. Also, personnel in charge of supervision at the Afadjato South District Education Directorate should educate kindergarten teachers to use play as a teaching technique.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Teachers, Ghana

Introduction

The influence of globalisation of education systems from early childhood education to higher education has been under enormous pressure to reform. Many countries undergoing educational reforms have referred to

international research findings and trends to create new pedagogy to meet those trends. Children in literate and non-literate cultures play regardless of their strength, challenges, mental health, socioeconomic status, and parenting. Play is a crucial component of an appropriate early childhood classroom. The past decade has seen an increase in research documenting the benefits of children learning through play. However, in the global world, the amount of play in American kindergarten classes, for instance, remains on a steady decline (Eberle, 2011). Play research has witnessed a rise in two seemingly contradictory trends. First, research increasingly shows that play expedites a variety of social, cognitive, motor, and linguistic improvements (Eberle 2011; Fisher et al. 2011). Social play allows children to become more creative and more adept at explaining meaning verbally, they are more successful at manipulating different symbol systems, and more confident when experimenting with new activities (Bjorklund & Gardiner 2011; Eberle 2011; Pellegrini 2011). In school settings, teachers gently guide play, using play-based teaching and learning activities to promote curricular goals while maintaining the critically important aspects of play such as children's intrinsic motivation to engage in play (Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong 2013; Eberle 2014; Fisher et al. 2009).

Second, and ironically, in spite of the many benefits of play recognized by academics, recent years have seen a steady decrease in the amount of time kindergarten classes devote to play (Brownson et al. 2010; Frost, 2008; Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). Past research has well documented the challenges public school kindergarten teachers face in implementing play in their classes and the shift towards more academically focused kindergarten teaching. The early years of human life provide a unique opportunity for social and cognitive investment, but at the same time, this is the most vulnerable period for all forms of stunting in development if holistic development is not nurtured (Brownson et al. 2010). Froebel (1987), writing on children's play contends that, play is not only the children's natural occupation before constraints and formal schooling takes over, but it also serves as a major means by which children use to communicate to themselves and to the world around. Children's play and teacher's involvement in play activities have received recognition and attention by philosophers and educationist for centuries (Froebel, 1987).

The activity of play in kindergarten is crucial to the development of children (Graue, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). With obligations to fulfill mandates such as "No Child Left Behind" (Lee, et al., 2006) and pressure to meet state and national standards, teachers are continuously decreasing the amount of play-centered activities in kindergarten classrooms. However, it is important to incorporate play into the curriculum for the development of children. Miller and Almon (2009), discuss that, "the traditional kindergarten classroom that most adults remember from childhood-with plenty of space and time for unstructured play and discovery, art and music, practicing social skills, and learning to enjoy learning-has largely disappeared" (p.42).

Much has been written about the cognitive, social, emotional, and language benefits of play, as well as the types and stages of play that take place in early childhood classrooms. Both the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognize and uphold the need for play as an essential part of early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). The theories of Piaget (cognitive and physical development) and Vygotsky (socio-cultural experiences) describe playing for children as optimal learning times (Elkind, 2004). Brain research also supports the importance of play during the critical periods of brain growth during the preschool years (Healy, 2004). The language supports symbolic thought in the play setting and is seen as a vehicle for the development of self-regulation, cognition, and social competence (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Today, the play seems to have taken a backseat in kindergarten to teacher-directed instruction based on the belief that the latter is more effective than the former in preparing children to perform well on standards-based assessments. Graue (2009) explained this by stating, "it seems expectations have evolved without a clear sense of purpose or of the needs of the children. The current focus on benchmarks and achievement has focused effort on what is tested rather than what is learned" (p. 30). This describes common practices seen in most kindergartens today (Ashiabi, 2007). In some kindergartens, the focus is mainly on drilling students with information that they need to know to meet expectations, with little time for play. Because of the expectations and standards that must be met, many teachers do not allow time for play, or only allow time for play if all material for the day is covered (Graue, 2009). However, teachers may not take into consideration the benefits of

play for the development of children. Warner and Parker (2005) expressed that, "Play is healthy and in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient" (p. 2). Therefore, it is critical for teachers to understand the importance of play in improving stress management and social skills, as well as to feel empowered to integrate play based learning activities in their kindergarten instruction (Ashiabi, 2007).

Ghana is among African countries that gave Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme a minimum attention in the past three decades. During this period, the children's early learning and stimulation were informal and unstructured. The absence of the formal Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes made children below eight years invisible in the country's education programme, a situation that denied children the opportunity to thrive both academically and socially. In the year 2007, a policy document on Early Childhood Care and Development for Ghana was made operational. The document forms part of the recommendations of the Government's white paper on Educational Reforms, makes kindergarten education progressively part of the Universal Free and Compulsory Basic Education. Under the policy, all Ghanaian children at the age of four are to receive two years of compulsory Early Childhood Development (ECD) education before entering primary one. Early childhood is the period of a child's growth from conception to the first eight years. This was contained in a speech delivered by the then First Lady Mrs. Theresa Kufour when she was opening the International African Conference on Early Childhood Development in Accra on the theme: "Moving Early Childhood Development Forward in Africa" (GNA, 2005). The most convenient way of assessing whether teaching in ECE is friendly and relevant to the child is through the teaching and learning strategies. Strategies and methods used by both teachers and pupils in teaching and learning are vital in the promotion of self-mastery of skills and concepts, especially at this tender age (Ashiabi, 2007).

In a child-centered kindergarten, teachers incorporate play into the daily curriculum. Students have the opportunity to explore their learning environment by means of free-play as well as through teacher-initiated play. Free-play is a play that is initiated by the child (Graue, 2009). Furthermore, free-play allows children to develop social relationships with other students, the opportunity to choose their own level of challenge, and the overall ability to make their own decisions (Ashiabi, 2007). Teacher-initiated play is where the teacher is involved in the interactions between students. The teacher is there to provide feedback, extend conversations, and bring in appropriate resources (Graue, 2009). With the focus on play-based learning, students continue to grow and develop appropriately as well as meet the expectations expected of them (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Early Childhood Education must support children to develop the ability to work and communicate their own impressions through creative processes with various forms of expression. The Ghanaian Pre-school curriculum is very flexible in terms of lesson content, coupled with the absence of external examinations to assess pre-schoolers' eligibility for primary school education (Ashiabi, 2007). The play has been described as a vehicle for learning, especially in an early childhood setting. This implies that for effective learning, play must be incorporated in ECE programs. Since teachers are key determinants of the experiences that children are exposed to, it is necessary to ascertain whether they embrace the use of play as a teaching technique in Ghanaian Kindergarten (Ashiabi, 2007).

After making Kindergarten Education compulsorily part of the formal school system in 2007, the Ministry of Education has continued to put emphasis on the use of child-centered teaching techniques that includes the use of play as a teaching approach in both indoor and outdoor learning activities. For most people, the fondest memories in school and outside of school were the times that they were involved in activities that incorporated play. One remembers kindergarten as a happy place one went, where one rarely sat at a table or desk. It was a place of creativity and fun. There was an abundant amount of art supplies, books, and an entire room with blocks, toys, and balls. Kindergarten was a place to interact with others and begin friendships (Eberle, 2011). Ironically, it is hard to imagine being a child in the kindergarten of today. There is a constant pressure and rush to finish work, meet standards, exceed milestones, and not be left behind. A metaphor that perfectly illustrates many kindergartens today was provided by Graue (2009), "Several ways exist for planning a trip. One way is to find a destination and get there as quickly as possible. The trip is all about being there, not getting there. It puts the race ahead of the journey" (p. 30).

Today, there is constant pressure put on kindergarten pupils and teachers to succeed and tackle milestones; however in the process, play is being pushed out of kindergarten in order for students to rush toward the acquisition of skills or knowledge without consideration for how the process of learning itself can lead to more important outcomes in addition to the targeted skills or knowledge (Graue 2009). Lyabwene (2010) conducted a study in Tanzania on how pre-primary school teachers' professional qualifications significantly affected the quality of classroom interaction. Complaints are raised by different ECE stakeholders on the unaddressed pedagogical challenges, especially teachers' tendency of using compulsive, direct, and unfriendly teacher-centered teaching strategies (United Republic of Tanzania {URT}, 2008). The case of Ghana is similar to that of Tanzania based on several reports from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including Sabre Charitable Trust, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The Right to Play and many others. In spite of the government of Ghana's strong policy commitment to the kindergarten sector, it continues to face challenges of access and quality. The needs at this level are significant, whereas learning materials are in short supply: almost half of all kindergarten teachers have never received any formal training (Ministry of Education (MoE), Ghana 2013 cited in Sabre Charitable Trust country report November 21, 2017). Also, another NGO called The Right to Play reports that early childhood educators still face curricula and pedagogical challenges and there is a discrepancy between the emphasis and the teaching techniques at the kindergartens (Right To Play Ghana, 2016).

A visit to some kindergarten schools in the Afadjato South District by the researchers indicates that, the play seems to be on a lower side as far as teaching and learning are concerned. It was observed in Five schools visited that most of the Early Childhood educators seem not to have enough knowledge, full control over play activities and using play as a teaching technique. Common among them was, young children are most often allowed to go out for a free play with little or no guidance or supervision. There are debates in the literature (Graue, 2009; Ashiabi, 2007) that one factor that accounts for the limited use of play in the kindergarten was the kind of perception teachers held regarding play as a teaching technique. There are some early childhood educators who believe that play as a teaching technique was not effective while others think otherwise (Eberle, 2011). It was, therefore, necessary to assess the perception of kindergarten teachers in Afadjato South District on the use of play as a teaching technique.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of Early Childhood Educators on the use of play as a teaching technique in the Afadjato South District.

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Assess the perception of early childhood education teachers on the use of play as a teaching technique in Afadjato South District.
2. Find out the extent to which early childhood education teachers of Afadjato South District engaged the use of play as a teaching technique.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of early childhood education teachers in the Afadjato South District on the use of play as a teaching technique?
2. To what extent do early childhood education teachers of Afadjato South District use play as a teaching technique?

The findings from this study would potentially improve the way kindergarten teachers employ play as a teaching technique. Additionally, this research finding would help Early Childhood Educators in the Afadjato South District to uncover their own perceptions about play.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Personal Investment Theory propounded by Maher in 1986. According to Personal Investment Theory, a person's perception towards a particular behaviour determines the way he or she invests his or her time, talent, and energy. This theory contends that the meaning of the activity, for instance, the meaning of play or use of play to a teacher, basically determines his or her Perception towards people, situations, objects,

and actions related to the play. The theory further suggests that a person may have a recognized talent or ability in performing a task but may not be interested in exhibiting the behaviour if the practice is not encouraged by his or her reference group. Thus, when a teacher's play behavior or other related play activities are favoured or appreciated by a social group(s), for instance, school management, other teachers or parents, the teacher is likely to choose to exhibit the behaviour more frequently. Consequently, frequency in behaviour will render to the increased investment of his or her additional time, energy, and skills in the behaviour. In this view, the school management may influence a teacher's use of play as a teaching technique.

Materials and Techniques

Cross-sectional descriptive design was used in the study to enable the study to cover a large section of the target population. This approach seeks to find out how the participants in the context perceive them (Al Kaabi, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002). The target population of the study was 230 Early Childhood Educators in the Afadjato South District of the Volta Region. This comprised 20 basic school heads, 20 school supervisors and 190 kindergarten teachers in the Afadjato South District. The accessible population was 180 Kindergarten 1 and 2 teachers; 20 heads and 20 supervisors. The target population for the study was 230 comprising 20 basic school heads, 20 school supervisors and 190 teachers teaching in the kindergartens in the Afadjato South District (Afadjato South District Education Directorate Report, 2018).

A sample of 120 participants was selected for the study. Thus, 100 kindergarten teachers, 10 basic school heads, and 10 school supervisors were selected for the study. Purposive, simple random, and convenience sampling techniques were used to select these participants. Purposive sampling technique helped to select information-rich participants. Simple random sampling was used to select school supervisors and kindergarten 1 and 2 teachers. Numbers "1" and "2" were written on pieces of papers, folded and placed in a basket. Thus, school supervisors and kindergarten 1 and 2 teachers were asked to select one of these papers, and those who selected "1" were made to respond to the questionnaire. Moreover, convenience sampling technique was used to select ten 10 heads out of the 20 heads for the interview. In this technique, heads were asked for their consent to be interviewed, and those who accepted were selected. In all, 110 questionnaires (100 for teachers and 10 for school supervisors) were administered while 10 interviews for school heads were conducted.

Self-developed questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data. The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section 'A' and 'B.' Section 'A' focused on background information (such as the gender, age, years in the current school, teaching experience and so on). Section 'B' comprised 5-points Likert scale items which were weighed as: Strongly Agree (SA)=5, Agree (A)=4, Undecided (UD)=3, Disagree (D)=2, and Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. However, negative statements on the questionnaire used the reverse scoring. Statements 1-5 were used to answer research question 1, and statements 6-10 were used to gathered data to answer research question 2. Also, the interview guide (semi-structured) was used to gather data. The interview guide had two sections: Section 'A' and 'B.' Section 'A' focused on demographic information of respondents (such as the gender, age, working experience and so on). Section 'B' focused on questions that helped to gather data so as to address the research questions. This was to help the researcher obtain deeper insights about the research problem. The semi-structured interview allowed flexibility in asking follow-up questions. It also offered an opportunity for the researcher to seek clarification through probing and expand the responses of the interviewees to ascertain their perception about using play as a teaching technique in kindergartens. The interview guide was also selected because it allowed the researcher to enter a pupil's viewpoint, to better understand their perspectives (Lichtman, 2010).

Face validity of the instrument was established by giving the prepared instrument to the experts in the field. Content validity of the instruments was ensured by experts in physical and early childhood education departments, and their comments were incorporated. For reliability check, the questionnaire was pilot tested on 50 kindergarten teachers, 5 heads and 5 school supervisors outside the setting of the main study and Cronbach's alpha reliability co-efficient was calculated, and 0.87 was obtained and rendered the questionnaire reliable as stipulated by (Amin, 2005).

Entry protocol was done when permission was sought from the District Director of Education, Afadjato South District, head-teachers, school supervisors and teachers. One Hundred and Twenty-four questionnaires were given to the kindergarten teachers and 10 to the head-teachers. Explanations of the questionnaires were given to kindergarten teachers and head-teachers and 60 minutes was given to them to respond to the items on the questionnaires. Questionnaires were retrieved on the same day, which resulted in about 85 percent return rate.

Descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically frequency counts, percentages, and multiple linear regression were used to analyse the quantitative data involving research questions 1 and 2. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse research questions 1. Also, multiple linear regression was used to analyse research question 2. This was because research question 2 sought to find out the extent to which the independent variable (early childhood educators) influences the dependent variable (play as a technique of teaching). Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS- version 2.1) were employed to aid in the analysis of the quantitative data.

For ethical reasons, headteachers interviewed were coded headteacher one to ten (HT: 1 to HT:10). This helped to promote confidentiality in this study, interviews were audio-taped after permission was first sought from participants. Besides, all references were duly acknowledged to avoid plagiarism.

Results/Discussions

Section A: Background Information of Participants

Statements 1-4 on the questionnaires were used to gather data on the background information of kindergarten teachers, heads of schools, and school supervisors. Table 1, 2, and 3 respectively present the results after the analysis.

Table 1: Background Information of Teachers (N=100)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	25
	Female	75	75
Age (in years)	25 and below	10	10
	26-30	32	32
	31-35	28	28
	36-40	16	16
	41 and above	14	14
Teaching Experience	1-10	30	30
	11-20	25	25
	21-30	24	24
	31-40	15	15
	41 and above	6	6
Years in Current school	1-10	48	48
	11-20	32	32
	21-30	15	15
	31-40	5	5
	41 and above	-	-

Source: Field data, 2018

Results from Table 1 show that the majority 75 (75%) of the kindergarten teachers were females as compared to their male counterparts who were 25(25%). This result implies that male and female kindergarten teachers were disproportionally represented. Likewise, there were more females kindergarten teachers assigned to kindergartens in the Afadjato South District. The results also revealed that majority of the teachers at the

kindergarten were between 26-30 years (32%), followed by 31-35 years (28%), 36-40 years (16%), 41 and above (14%) and 25 and below (10%). These results suggest that kindergarten teachers selected cut across all ages with the majority been in their youthful stage. Implicitly, if these youths are guided on how to effectively use play as a teaching technique in the Afadjato South District, it would help improve upon children's understanding of the concept taught. Likewise, as the results imply that most of the teachers were in their youthful stage, if the conditions and relevant components of teaching at the kindergarten be addressed, then, the youthful exuberance of these teachers could be tapped for the development of the teaching profession.

The results in Table 1 further show that majority (30%) of the teachers had 1-10 years of teaching experience, followed by 11-20 years (25%), 21-30 years (24%), 31-40 years (15%) and 41 and above (6%). These results imply that kindergarten teachers had long and short teaching experiences, respectively. The results from Table 1 also show that majority of them had stayed in their current schools between 1-10 years (48%), as compared to 11-20 years (32%), 21-30 years (15%), and 31-40 years (5%). This result could suggest that these teachers have gained some form of experience in their current schools and, therefore, were likely to help gather data to address the research questions.

Table 2: Background Information of Head-teachers (N=10)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	4	40
	Female	6	60
Age (in years)	25 and below	-	-
	26-30	2	20
	31-35	3	30
	36-40	4	40
	41 and above	1	10
Teaching Experience	1-10	2	20
	11-20	5	50
	21-30	2	20
	31-40	1	10
	41 and above	-	-
Years in Current school	1-10	4	40
	11-20	5	50
	21-30	1	10
	31-40	-	-
	41 and above	-	-

Source: Field data, 2018

Results from Table 2 show that majority 6(60%) of the heads were females as compared to males 4(40%). The results correspond with the results on the gender of teachers used in this study. The results suggest that male and female head teachers were given almost a fair representation in this study. This results infer that the more female teachers in the Afadjato South District, the higher the likelihood of having more female heads. The results could imply that these female heads were likely to find it difficult to control their male teachers during instructional supervision. The results further show that majority (40%) of the heads were between 36-40 years, followed by 31-35 years (30%), 26-30 years (20%) and 41 and above (10%). The results imply that though the majority of the heads were in their youthful stage, they have been able to climb higher on the educational ladder, and this has implicitly resulted in their headship positions. Consequently, the results could infer that if these heads are given the needed support in their headship, it will help improve teaching and learning in the Afadjato South District.

The results from Table 2 further show that half (50%) of the heads had 11-20 years of teaching experience, followed by 1-10 years (20%), 21-30 years (20%) and 31-40 years (10%). The results also show that half (50%) of them had been in their current schools between 11-20 years as compared to 1-10 years (40%), and 21-30 years

(10%). It is worth nothing that though selection of supervision position (headteacher) in Ghana is based on professional background and rank in Ghana Education Service (GES), which is also determined by the length of service and not necessary the academic qualification, the crop of headteachers in the Afadjato South District could be highly commendable for their working experiences. These results, therefore, advocate that, in the near future, leadership management position would not be a major issue to bother about in the Afadjato South District.

Table 3: Background Information of School Supervisors (N=10)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	6	60
	Female	4	40
Age (in years)	25 and below	1	10
	26-30	2	20
	31-35	3	30
	36-40	2	20
	41 and above	2	20
Working Experience	1-10	4	40
	11-20	3	30
	21-30	2	20
	31-40	1	10
	41 and above	-	-
Years in Current school	1-10	6	60
	11-20	4	40
	21-30	-	-
	31-40	-	-
	41 and above	-	-

Source: Field data, 2018

Results from Table 3 show that majority 6(60%) of the school supervisors were males as compared to 4(40%) females. The results recommend that both male and female teachers have been given the opportunity to supervise basic public schools in the Afadjato South District. The results further show that majority of the supervisors were between the ages of 31-35 years (30%), as compared to 26-30 years (20%), 36-40 years (20%), 41 and above (20%) and 25 and below (10%). The results also show that majority (40%) of the school supervisors had 1-10 years working experience, followed by 11-20 years (30%), 21-30 years (20%) and 31-40 years (10%). Again, the results from Table 3 show that the majority of the school supervisors had spent 1-10 years in their current schools (60%) as compared to 11-20 years (40%).

Research Question 1: What is the perception of early childhood teachers on the use of play as a teaching technique in Afadjato South District?

Research question one (1) sought to find out the perception of early childhood teachers on the use of play as a teaching technique in Afadjato South District. Statements 1-5 on the questionnaires for kindergarten teachers were used to address this question. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Perception of Early Childhood Teachers on the use of play as a Teaching Technique (N=100)

Statements	Means	Standard Deviations
Teachers use play as a teaching technique because it helps the children to understand lessons easily	4.42	0.32
Teachers don't use play in teaching because of a lack of teaching and learning materials	3.80	0.28
Some parents see play as a waste of time; hence, teachers don't use it when teaching	3.38	0.76
Using play requires a lot of time and since teachers have less time to teach a lesson they don't use it at all	3.30	0.79
Teachers use to play, and this makes children to involve themselves in the teaching and learning process actively	3.85	0.25

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 4 shows that majority ($M=4.42$, $SD=0.32$) of the teachers appear to believe that "teachers used play as a teaching technique because it helps the children to understand lessons easily", followed by "teachers use play, and this makes children to actively involve themselves in the teaching and learning process" ($M=3.85$, $SD=.25$), "teachers do not use play in teaching because of lack of teaching and learning materials" ($M=3.80$, $SD=0.28$), "using play requires a lot of time and since teachers have less time to teach a lesson they don't use it at all" ($M=3.38$, $SD=0.76$), and "some parents see play as a waste of time; hence, teachers don't use it when teaching" ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.79$).

The results support the findings of Ashiabi (2005) assertion that play has the values and ability to foster the socio-emotional developmental progress of learners. He claimed to play to be the perfect venue for the development of socio-emotional readiness and overall success in school and life. Play enhanced the children's ability to role-play, reflect before acting, the ability to show empathy, and their emotional understanding and self-regulation. Cooperation, negotiation, problem-solving, group work, and getting along are also stimulated in children's play even without adult intervention. Both student-initiated and teacher-guided play is important to children's development. Ashiabi (2005) stated that early childhood educators have a role in making play a developmental and learning experience for young children. Children who are mentally healthy tend to be happier, show a greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in-class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, Rupiper, & Gregory, 2015). Play is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient

These results imply that kindergarten teachers appear to believe that for children to have a better understanding of concepts taught, they have to use play as a teaching technique. This result infers that when kindergarten teachers allow children to have a feel of, manipulate, and permitted to freely interact with their peers and learning materials, their understanding will be enhanced. These help learners to own and construct their own knowledge. Further, the results could imply that kindergarten children grasp lessons taught by their teachers when they use more of play as a teaching technique as confirmed by the Personal Investment Theory (Maher, 1986) used in this study. Thus, early childhood teachers in the Afadjato South District would invest their time, talents, and energies when it comes to the use of play teaching technique. From these results, it could be concluded that early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District have positive perceptions on the use of play as a teaching technique. These findings are in consonance with the findings of Bredekamp (1987) and Ng'asike (2004). According to Bredekamp, teachers' support in children play activities is an extremely important developmental practice as it enhances smooth teaching and facilitates children's learning at their own pace. Ng'asike (2004) purports that teachers in pre-primary schools should focus on investing in play as an appropriate and natural opportunity to reinforce and introduce new concepts to children.

These findings are contrary to the findings of some other studies. For example, there are debates in the literature (Graue, 2009; Ashiabi, 2007) that one factor that accounts for the limited use of play in the kindergarten is the kind of perception teachers hold regarding play as a teaching technique. There are some early childhood educators who believe that play as a teaching technique is not effective, however, some think otherwise (Eberle, 2011). However, these findings contradict the findings of other studies. Although teachers seem to acknowledge the role of play in developing skills, they seem unsure of how to utilize play in an instructional manner (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). Despite a plethora of research suggesting positive outcomes associated with opportunities to engage in social play and negative out-comes associated with peer rejection; there is often a hands-off policy during recess and free-play time in school. Teachers tend to underestimate the prevalence of bullying and do not appear to recognize their potential roles as preventing violence and promoting pro-social skill development (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

Research Question 2: To what extent do early childhood teachers' perception influences their use of play as a teaching technique?

Research question two (2) sought to find out the extent to which early childhood teachers' perceptions influence their use of play as a teaching technique. Statements 6-10 on the questionnaires for school heads were used to gather data to address this question. Linear multiple regression was used to analyse the quantitative data. The quantitative data results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Linear Multiple Regression Model Summary on how Early Childhood Teachers' Perception Influences the Use of Play as a Teaching Technique

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.974	0.949	0.945		0.899

Source: Field data, 2018

Linear Multiple Regression test results from Table 5 revealed that 94.9% of the variance in play as a teaching technique was collectively explained by the indicator (early childhood teachers) which was found to be statistically significant [$F(3, 47) = 289.125, p = .000$] at 0.05 alpha level. The results suggest that the model performed well with about 5.1% shrinkage in the variance, which was explained by the population. The results further suggest that, the sample was a good representation of the population. The shrinkage could be as a result of the differences in the characteristics of the sample and the population.

Table 6: Coefficients Result of Linear Multiple Regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
ECEP	-10.323	1.119		-9.225	0.000
UPTM	0.470	0.010	0.975	46.397	0.000

Source: Field data, 2018

($p > 0.05$).

KEY: ECEP=Early Childhood Educators' Perception

UPTM=Use of Play as a Teaching Technique

The results from Table 6 show that early childhood teachers contributed significantly to the use of play as a teaching technique ($\beta = 0.975, p = 0.000$) at 0.05 alpha level. This result suggests that the perceptions kindergarten teachers have could, in a way, influence their use of play as a teaching technique. The results could also imply that if kindergarten teachers have positive perception towards play as a teaching technique, they were

likely to use it more. However, the more kindergarten teachers have a negative perception towards the use of play as a teaching technique, the less they were likely to use it. These results infer that early childhood teachers' perceptions significantly influenced their use of play as a teaching technique.

The results confirm that of Fogle and Mendez (2006) whose correlated data reported in the Parent Play Belief Scale (PPBS) and the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS). The authors concluded that parents' positive attitudes towards play were related to children's social competence. The researchers found a correlation between the PPBS and children's positive peer play behaviour. Fogle and Mendez (2006) concluded that children whose parents had a greater knowledge of the need for play also had high levels of social competence. Parents' beliefs about play appeared to be worthy of consideration. Some parents may not be aware of the importance of play in building social competence. Parents with high academic focus scores on their PPBS showed a negative correlation to their reported level of educational achievement. This indicated that parents with less education valued academics highly for their children. Both parents and early childhood educators can feel confident that important social skills are learned through play. This study delivered quantitative evidence correlating positive parents' views of play with their children's social competence.

Also, interview guide data from research questions two (2) based on direct quotes and explanations used were analysed. For instance, one school supervisor said:

In my attempt to go round the school to supervise kindergarten teachers' technique of teaching, I realised that some teachers have a positive perception of play and as a result take the initiative to use play as a teaching technique [SS: 2].

Another participant said something similar:

From my experience as a school supervisor for the past ten years, I have realised that the perception teachers have towards play as a teaching technique is the only way that can guarantee their use of it [SS: 8].

Similarly, a third participant said:

I strongly believe that when teachers have a positive perception to the use of play, it could encourage them to use it during teaching and learning process [SS: 5].

These comments connote that the kind of perceptions school supervisors and teachers have towards play could influence its use as a teaching technique. These comments advocate that if kindergarten teachers have positive perceptions towards play, they will use it as a technique of teaching. However, if they have negative perceptions, it could adversely influence its use as a teaching technique.

Interestingly, as it pertains to the extent to which early childhood teachers perceive the use of play as a teaching technique, these findings confirm with the Personal Investment Theory by Maehr (1986). The theory proposes that a person's subjective judgment of his or her ability to perform a task effectively tends to influence the individual's choice to exhibit or inhibit behaviour. When a teacher believes in his or her competence and knowledge in early childhood teaching practices, he or she will increase his or her investment of skills, energy, and talents in use of play as a child-centered teaching and learning approach. The theory suggests that a knowledgeable and skilled person in any area of specialty tends to exhibit a professional behaviour in autonomous and assertive manner regardless of the existence of some impeding factors.

Moreover, developmental theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky posit that teachers' positive perception towards play as a teaching technique contributes to the cognitive implication of play for development (Schiffman, 2003). While Piaget describes play as practice for the strengthening of skills and existing schema (i.e., assimilation). Contemporary researchers have extended these theoretical considerations to address the role of play in literacy development (Owocki, 1999; Schiffman, 2003), social competence in a variety of settings (Connolly & Doyle, 1984), and assessment of functioning (Casby, 2003). Additionally, when children demonstrate pro-social inclusive behaviours, classrooms become environmentally conducive to overall learning (Wentzel, 1991). Based

on the quantitative and qualitative results, it was concluded that kindergarten teachers' perception positively influenced their use of play as a teaching technique.

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The findings showed that early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District have positive perceptions on the use of play as a teaching technique. The findings indicated that kindergarten teachers' perception positively influenced their use of play as a teaching technique. Based on these findings, the following conclusions have been drawn: To commence with, early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District have good intentions on the use of play as a teaching technique. This suggests that kindergarten teachers in Afadjato South District have positive perception towards the use of play as a teaching technique. Also, kindergarten teachers' could use play as a teaching technique depending on their perception towards play. This result suggests that one way or the other; their perceptions could either positively or negatively influence their use of play as a teaching technique.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. Through in-service training, headteachers should encourage early childhood teachers in Afadjato South District to continuously have positive perception towards play as a teaching technique. This could help them to continuously use play as a teaching technique in teaching kindergarten children in Afadjato South District.
2. Personnel in charge of supervision at the Afadjato South District Education Directorate should educate kindergarten teachers on the use to use play as a teaching technique. This could help them use it more often in their lesson delivery; hence, could help children have a better understanding of lessons taught.

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