



# **Experiences of teachers with the implementation of play-based pedagogy at Early Childhood Centres in Yilo-Krobo Municipality**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined early childhood teachers' experiences in implementing play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The research adopted a qualitative, interpretivist approach, using an exploratory case study design. Thirteen early childhood educators were selected purposively, and data were collected through a structured interview guide and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that a majority of the teachers reported an acute shortage of teaching and learning materials, which significantly impeded the effective use of play-based learning. Most participants indicated that training opportunities related to play-based pedagogy were infrequent and irregular, which limited their ability to consistently apply learner-centred strategies. Over half of the teachers expressed the need for sustained professional development and external support, particularly from NGOs such as Sabre, Right to Play, and World Vision, to strengthen their competence and confidence in using play-based approaches. Participants also emphasised the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure the relevance and impact of training on classroom practices. The study recommends that the education directorate intensify advocacy and community awareness on the value of play-based learning and prioritise the provision of adequate resources and support systems to enhance its implementation in early childhood centres.

**Keywords:** Play-based Pedagogy, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Zone of Proximal Development, Early Childhood, Education Centres.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Globally, play-based learning is recognised as a developmentally appropriate pedagogy that enhances children's learning through exploration, inquiry, and hands-on engagement (NAEYC, 2006). As a child-centred approach, play-based learning promotes open-ended discovery and supports multiple domains of development, making it a critical component of effective early childhood education (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014; Danniels, 2018). In Ghana, both the 2006 Kindergarten Curriculum and the 2019 Standards-Based Curriculum emphasise the facilitation of children's learning through play, underscoring the national commitment to child-centred and developmentally appropriate practices.

However, the effective implementation of this pedagogy depends heavily on teachers' knowledge, competence, and access to adequate learning resources. Although the curriculum mandates play-based teaching, many kindergarten teachers in Ghana continue to face challenges that hinder full implementation. Studies reveal that several teachers are ill-prepared due to insufficient pre-service exposure to play pedagogy, limited in-service professional development, and inadequate understanding of how to translate play-based approaches into classroom practice (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2011; Associates for Change, 2016; Sofo et al, 2015; Tamanja, 2016). Compounding these issues are structural constraints such as shortages of teaching and learning materials and the high proportion of teachers who have not received formal early childhood training. Darkwa and Lartey (2018) further highlight poor-quality early childhood services in some districts, characterised by limited resources, low teacher qualifications, and restricted access to professional learning opportunities.

Although the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, and NGOs such as Sabre Education and Right to Play have introduced interventions to strengthen play-based pedagogy, significant gaps remain at the classroom level. Interactions with early childhood teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality indicate varying understandings of play, inconsistent use of play-based strategies, inadequate supervision of play activities, and limited access to instructional materials. Some teachers view play as peripheral rather than as a structured pedagogical tool, resulting in children often engaging in unguided free play instead of purposeful play-based learning. Others report that workshops and training programmes do not sufficiently address their practical challenges or build their confidence in facilitating play-based activities.

Despite these concerns, there is limited documented research that specifically examines how teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality experience the implementation of play-based pedagogy. The available literature and local engagements point to notable gaps in teachers' preparedness, beliefs, resource availability, and professional support, yet these gaps have not been systematically explored within this particular context. This absence of empirical evidence presents a critical problem, as it limits the ability of stakeholders to design context-responsive interventions that address teachers' needs and strengthen the quality of early childhood education in the municipality. It is against this backdrop that this present study sought to explore teachers' experiences with the implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore early-childhood teachers' experiences with the availability of appropriate material resources and preparedness in implementing play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do early-childhood teachers perceive the availability and adequacy of material resources for implementing play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centres within Yilo-Krobo Municipality?
2. What are early childhood teachers' experiences regarding their training and preparedness for play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centres within Yilo-Krobo Municipality?

### **Theoretical framework**

#### ***Socio-cultural theory of Play (Lev Vygotsky, 1978)***

This study is grounded in Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which examines the central role of social, cultural, and historical contexts in children's cognitive development. Vygotsky argued that learning is socially mediated and that children construct knowledge through interactions with more knowledgeable others within their environment. Two foundational concepts underpin this theory: the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. The ZPD refers to the gap between what a child can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance, while scaffolding represents the support provided by teachers or peers to help children progress within this zone (Vygotsky, 1978).

Within the context of play, Vygotsky asserted that children often operate at levels above their everyday functioning because play naturally creates opportunities for role-taking, problem-solving, and imaginative engagement. Through pretend play and collaborative activities, children acquire language, social skills, and higher-order thinking as they interact with more experienced peers or adults guiding the learning process (Bodrova & Leong, 2019). Recent scholarship continues to support this perspective, highlighting that play provides an ideal environment for scaffolding, collaborative learning, and the co-construction of knowledge (Fleer, 2020; Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2023). These studies affirm that play-based interactions enable children to demonstrate emerging competencies that are strengthened through intentional adult support.

The socio-cultural theory is therefore highly relevant to the implementation of play-based pedagogy. Contemporary research shows that when teachers create play-rich environments and engage in guided interaction, they activate children's ZPD and foster deeper cognitive and social development (Daniels, 2021; Pyle & Alaca, 2020). For teachers in early childhood centres, this means that purposeful and scaffolded play experiences provide learners with opportunities to explore, negotiate, communicate, and construct meaning within culturally situated contexts.

In relation to this study, the socio-cultural theory helps explain how teachers' practices influence children's learning during play-based activities. It highlights the importance of teacher expertise, guidance, and intentional interaction in enabling children to reach higher levels of competence. The theory aligns with the study's focus by emphasising that effective play-based pedagogy requires teachers to identify children's developmental needs, recognise their ZPD, and provide appropriate scaffolding to support their progress. Thus, the socio-cultural lens provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding teachers' experiences, the challenges they face in guiding play, and the types of support necessary to enhance play-based learning within early childhood centres in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Availability and Adequacy of Material Resources for Implementing Play-based Pedagogy*

Play-based pedagogy is widely recognised as central to early childhood education, grounded in developmental theories that emphasise active, meaningful engagement. Piaget, as cited by Parker and Thomsen (2019), asserts that play facilitates cognitive development by enabling children to construct knowledge through environmental interaction, while Vygotsky highlights its socio-cultural dimension, suggesting that play fosters social learning and scaffolding within the child's zone of proximal development (Main, 2021). Material resources are thus essential, serving as the medium through which children explore, imagine, and create. Tools such as building blocks, puzzles, art supplies, outdoor equipment, and storybooks support holistic development, including creativity, problem-solving, social collaboration, and fine motor skills (Pyle & Daniels, 2017).

Research shows that adequate resources enable teachers to implement active, learner-centred pedagogy, while scarcity often constrains instruction, pushing educators towards rote, teacher-directed methods (Jay & Knaus, 2018). Improvised, locally available materials stones, sticks, and recycled containers, can supplement formal resources, enhancing play experiences when teachers innovate (Trina, 2022). Globally, resource availability varies: well-resourced classrooms in countries such as Finland, Australia, and the United States facilitate inclusion and exploration (Marks, 2020), whereas many early childhood centres in Sub-Saharan Africa operate with minimal resources, necessitating improvisation and community support (Adamu, 2024).

In Ghana, NaCCA's Kindergarten curriculum promotes play as the core medium for learning, emphasising the provision of teaching and learning materials (NaCCA, 2019; Adams et al., 2024). Despite this, empirical evidence highlights persistent shortages, particularly in rural and peri-urban schools, where teachers often improvise with locally available objects (Shah, 2018; Quaynor & Osei, 2021; Song, 2023). Yilo Krobo, like many rural districts, faces similar challenges, with dispersed settlements and limited funding affecting resource provision. Community support partially mitigates these gaps, yet disparities remain.

Overall, the literature confirms that material resources are pivotal in shaping play-based pedagogy. Adequate provision fosters inclusive, active, and creative learning, while scarcity limits teachers' capacity to realise the curriculum's play-based ambitions. This study explores the resources available to teachers in Yilo Krobo, addressing a critical gap in the empirical evidence.

### *Training level of teachers regarding play-based pedagogical practices*

The effective implementation of play-based pedagogy relies not only on curriculum policy but also on teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence to apply play principles in classrooms. Ghana's Kindergarten curriculum positions play as the primary medium for learning, requiring teachers to adopt creative, play-centred strategies (NaCCA, 2019; James, 2020). Translating this intent into practice necessitates targeted professional development (PD) that equips teachers with practical skills for designing, facilitating, and assessing play activities.

Empirical studies in Ghana indicate mixed levels of teacher preparedness for play-based approaches. Dzamesi and van Heerden (2020) noted that variability in teacher competence, while McChesney and Aldridge (2019) report that intensive, coaching-based PD significantly improves classroom quality and children's learning outcomes. National initiatives, including collaborations between the Ghana Education Service, NaCCA, and NGOs such as Right To

Play, aim to cascade PD through train-the-trainer models. However, uneven reach and intensity across districts limit consistent adoption of play-based practices (Onyango et al., 2023; Laney, 2025).

Persistent gaps exist, especially in rural municipalities, where teachers often have limited pre-service training and attend infrequent, theory-heavy workshops (Eshun, 2022). Teachers frequently report uncertainty about structuring sustained, purposeful play sessions, linking play to learning objectives, and conducting formative assessment within play contexts. Where PD does occur, the absence of follow-up coaching, classroom observation, and contextually appropriate teaching and learning materials undermines the durability of change.

Findings from district and municipal studies in Ghana emphasise the contextual inequalities that shape teacher preparedness. Research in districts such as Ho West District and Jomoro Municipality shows that teachers in under-resourced settings rely heavily on improvisation, and that PD efforts are more effective when they include locally relevant examples and support for using improvised materials in play activities (Tatsi et al, 2025; Eshun, 2022). This suggests that teacher training must be sensitive to resource realities and model how to design high-quality play with low-cost, locally available materials (Wolf, 2018). In Yilo Krobo, Sakyi (2022) found that teachers rely on traditional routines due to insufficient PD, irregular mentoring, and limited material support, with community and peer initiatives serving as partial mitigators.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Approach*

The study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach method emphasises the exploration of subjective experiences and the meanings that people attribute to them. This approach is particularly useful in exploring complex social phenomena, such as the experiences by teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The Qualitative approach provides several benefits for this type of study. Since qualitative approach enables the researcher to ask questions in textual form to understand human experience, it was necessary to employ this approach in the study. In the view of Kusi (2012), qualitative researchers aim to understand 'depth' rather than 'breadth' or explore a phenomenon in detail. They are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how individuals make sense of their world and the experiences they have within it (Tisdell et.al., 2025).

One benefit of the Qualitative approach is its ability to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of teachers. This approach enables open-ended questions and flexible data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, allowing researchers to gather rich and nuanced data on teachers' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2017). The task of qualitative research is to gain insights into constructions of reality; that is to tease out the nature of the world as it is experienced, structured and interpreted by people in the course of their everyday lives (Cropley, 2019). According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), qualitative research is a form of research that involves description to the data obtained. It seeks to describe and analyse the behaviour of groups from the point of view of those being studied.

### *Research Design*

An exploratory single case study design was employed for this study (Yin, 2021). A case study is a qualitative research approach that involves the in-depth exploration of a specific case, such as the experiences of teachers in implementing play-based pedagogy in Early Childhood Centres in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The design was considered appropriate to ascertain the experiences of teachers in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers. Case study research design involves a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular event, situation, organisation, or social unit. Typically, a case has a defined space and time frame: "a phenomenon of some sort in a bounded context" (Saldaña, 2018).

One benefit of the Exploratory Case Study design is its ability to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the implementation process. This design enables researchers to investigate the implementation of play-based pedagogy in a specific context, providing insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder its implementation. One strength of the case study design is that it can capture and explore the complexity of a phenomenon, leading to a deeper understanding. This is what large-scale quantitative studies fail to achieve because, in most cases, they collect superficial information about a phenomenon for generalisation (Kusi, 2012). Another strength of case study design is action-centered and, therefore, the findings are useful for improving practice (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003). Notwithstanding these strengths, the case study design has been critiqued in diverse ways, including the fact that the findings are difficult to generalise. This is because such studies often concentrate on an instance or a few instances of a phenomenon and involve a relatively small sample

size. Given the fact that the advantages of using the case study design in this study outweigh the disadvantages, the case study design was considered more appropriate for the study.

### **Population**

The target population of the study was 148 teachers teaching in Early Childhood Centers (ECCs) in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. The teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality are the key population for this study, as they have firsthand experience of the challenges and opportunities of implementing play-based pedagogy in this context. Agyedu, Donkor and Obeng (2011), defined population in research as the complete set of individuals (subjects), objects or events with common observable features for which a researcher is interested in studying. It is also regarded as the larger group from which individuals are selected to participate in a study. A population is also defined as a group of individuals or people with the same characteristics in whom the researcher is interested (Blanche et al., 2006). Kusi (2012, p. 80) defines target population as “a group of individuals that the researcher generalises his/her findings”.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The study employed purposive sampling to select 13 early childhood teachers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Purposive sampling was selected because it allows researchers to select participants strategically based on their experience, knowledge, and relevance to the research questions (Patton, 2002). In this study, participants were selected specifically because they had direct experience implementing play-based pedagogy following the introduction of the new Standards-Based Curriculum, and they possessed formal early childhood education qualifications from colleges of education or universities. This approach ensured that the data collected reflected informed perspectives on the practical implementation of play-based instructional practices.

To be included in the study, teachers were required to have a minimum of three to four years of teaching experience in early childhood education post-implementation of the new curriculum. This criterion was set to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to play-based pedagogical practices and could provide rich, contextually grounded insights.

The sample size of 13 was deemed sufficient because data saturation was achieved during the interviews, where no new themes or significant information emerged from additional participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation was reached when responses became repetitive, and the researcher was confident that the information gathered was comprehensive enough to address the study objectives. Purposive sampling, combined with data saturation, ensured the credibility, relevance, and richness of the data collected. According to Alvi (2016), a sample is a small, representative subset of a population, and careful selection of knowledgeable participants enhances the reliability of findings and the applicability of conclusions to the broader population.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The study employed a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument for data collection based on its objectives and research questions. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognised for their flexibility, allowing researchers to combine predetermined questions with follow-up probes to elicit detailed and context-specific insights (Lim, 2025; Minh, 2025).

The interview guide was organised into two main sections aligned with the study objectives. The first section focused on teachers' experiences with the availability, adequacy, and usability of material resources supporting play-based learning, including the types of resources, their suitability for various play activities, and how resource availability affected instructional practices. The second section explored teachers' level of training in play-based pedagogical practices, including pre-service education, in-service training, workshops, and professional development programmes. Probing questions were included to understand the relevance, frequency, and effectiveness of these training experiences and any gaps affecting teachers' competence and confidence. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification and deeper exploration. This approach ensured rich, nuanced, and contextually grounded data directly aligned with the study objectives (Rabionet, 2022).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The field data were collated, reviewed, and cleaned to address partially answered or unanswered items. The study employed thematic analysis as the primary data analysis method. This approach involved a systematic process of coding, categorising, and interpreting data collected through the semi-structured interview guide. The analysis was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study and was aiming to identify teachers' experiences in implementing play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres within the Yilo-Krobo Municipality.

Thematic analysis followed a three-tier process of description, analysis, and interpretation. The researcher read the interview transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the data, generated initial codes, and grouped

related codes into categories from which themes and sub-themes were developed (Perera, 2023). This process involved active reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher's influence in the meaning-making process. To ensure anonymity, letters of the English alphabet were assigned to participants, allowing for efficient identification during data presentation while maintaining confidentiality. The emerging themes and sub-themes were reviewed and discussed with the research team to ensure accuracy, coherence, and faithful representation of participants' views.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the study to ensure the protection, rights, and dignity of all participants. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board, and formal permission was sought from the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the expected duration of participation, as well as their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations provided verbally and in writing, ensuring that they understood the voluntary nature of their participation and the intended use of the data. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all stages: participants' identities were protected using pseudonyms, and data were securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher.

The study also adhered to principles of research integrity, ensuring honesty, transparency, and accountability in the collection, analysis, and reporting of data. Participants were assured that the findings would be reported objectively and respectfully, without misrepresentation, and used solely for academic purposes. These measures collectively safeguarded participants' rights and strengthened the trustworthiness and ethical rigor of the study.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Demographic Characteristics of Participants***

The study involved 13 early childhood teachers purposively selected from the Yilo-Krobo Municipality, chosen for their experience and knowledge in implementing play-based pedagogy following the introduction of the new Standards-Based Curriculum. Of the 13 participants, 11 were female, and 2 were male, reflecting the predominance of female educators in early childhood education within the municipality.

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 42 years, providing a mix of early-career and experienced teachers. In terms of teaching experience, all participants had a minimum of three years, with some having up to ten years of experience in early childhood education. Specifically, all participants had at least three to four years of experience teaching after the implementation of the new Standards-Based Curriculum, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to play-based pedagogical practices.

Regarding professional qualifications, all participants had formal early childhood education training, having completed programmes at colleges of education or universities. This educational background provided them with the foundational pedagogical knowledge necessary for facilitating play-based learning activities. The participants' gender, age, teaching experience, and professional qualifications provided a diverse yet relevant sample, enabling the collection of rich, contextually grounded data.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

The interview results aimed at presenting the voice of the participants in the study, and to ensure a thorough assessment of the experiences of teachers in the implementation of play-based pedagogy at early childhood centers in the Yilo-Krobo Municipality. During the presentation, the stories of the participants are interspersed with essential quotations that expound their personal views, particularly in relation to their behaviour. It is worthy of note that only vital responses are provided for the analysis, and all names provided in the analysis are participants' pseudonyms and not their real names. The data had been analysed based on themes (thematic analysis). The analysis was based on the research questions for the study. What characterises the data is the widespread agreement of the respondents on the issues. There was absolute unanimity in the responses to several of the questions or items, and this degree of unanimity gave much power to the results.

### ***Research Question 1: How do early-childhood teachers perceive the availability and adequacy of material resources for implementing play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centres within Yilo-Krobo Municipality?***

Data for this research question were analysed using a thematic approach, which involved multiple readings of the interview transcripts, initial coding, clustering of codes, and the development of overarching themes. The analysis generated major themes, which capture the constraints teachers face in accessing adequate materials for play-based pedagogy.

### **Theme 1: Availability and Accessibility of Material Resources**

This theme highlights how limited, poor-quality, and unevenly distributed material resources affect teachers' ability to implement diverse, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate play-based learning experiences. Here are some sub-themes and excerpts from the interview;

#### **Subtheme 1.1: Limited Resources Provided**

*Most of the materials we have are just a few toys and some old blocks. We rarely receive art materials or outdoor play items that can support different play activities. T4*

*The children always use the same set of bottle tops and building blocks because that is basically what the school provides. We hardly get new or varied resources for literacy or pretend play. T10*

#### **Subtheme 1.2: Adequacy and Quality of Resources**

*The available materials are not enough for the whole class. Even when I plan group activities, some children have to wait because we don't have enough items for everyone to participate. T7*

*Most of the materials are worn out and not suitable for active play. Some puzzles are missing pieces, and the toys are old, so the children easily lose interest. T3*

#### **Subtheme 1.3: Accessibility for All Centres**

*When I visited another school in town, I realised they had more learning materials than we do here. In our rural setting, we only get a few items once in a long while. T1*

*Schools in the urban areas seem to have better support and more supplies. Here, we mostly depend on what we can improvise because the resource distribution is not the same. T9*

The quotes imply that limited, poor-quality, and unevenly distributed materials hinder diverse play opportunities, restrict full participation, reduce learner engagement, and create inequities between rural and urban centres, ultimately undermining effective implementation of play-based pedagogy.

### **Theme 2: Utilisation of Resources in Play-Based Pedagogy**

This theme explores how teachers apply, adapt, and creatively manage available resources to support play-based learning. It highlights the strategies teachers use to integrate materials into daily lessons, improvise when supplies are limited, and ensure activities align with curriculum expectations and developmental goals. Here are the sub-themes and excerpts from the interview;

#### **Subtheme 2.1: Teachers' Integration of Resources into Daily Activities**

*Every morning, I select a few materials that fit the day's lesson, but because the options are limited, I often repeat the same activities. T6*

*I try to include resources in literacy, numeracy, and creativity sessions, but sometimes the lack of variety makes it difficult to plan engaging activities. T2*

#### **Subtheme 2.2: Creativity and Improvisation by Teachers When Resources Are Limited**

*When the materials are not enough, I improvise with bottle tops, stones, or cardboard so the children can still participate in the activities. T5*

*We create our own teaching aids with local materials, but it takes time, and the results are not always durable for repeated play. T11*

#### **Subtheme 2.3: Alignment with Curriculum Goals and Child Development Needs**

*I always try to make sure the activities match the curriculum, but sometimes the lack of resources makes it hard to achieve the learning goals fully. T3*

*We want to meet developmental targets, but without the right materials, some skills like fine motor or pretend play, are not well supported. T8*

These quotes imply that although teachers make deliberate efforts to integrate and improvise resources, limitations in variety, quality, and availability reduce their ability to deliver curriculum-aligned, developmentally appropriate, and engaging play-based learning experiences.

### **Theme 3: Challenges and Support Systems**

This theme examines the broader constraints that affect teachers' ability to effectively implement play-based pedagogy, including financial limitations, inadequate institutional support, and gaps in professional development. It also highlights the extent to which available support systems influence teachers' confidence, preparedness, and instructional practices. Here are the sub-themes and excerpts from the interview;

#### **Subtheme 3.1: Financial and Logistical Constraints in Resource Provision**

*Sometimes the school wants to buy materials, but the funds are simply not enough, so we manage with whatever is available. T2*

*Transporting or acquiring new resources is difficult because the school doesn't have a budget for regular purchases or replacements. T7*

#### **Subtheme 3.2: Institutional and Governmental Support**

*We hear about policies promoting play-based learning, but the actual support rarely gets to us in the classroom. T1*

*The district office promises materials or guidance, but we receive them late or sometimes not at all. T6*

#### **Subtheme 3.3: Professional Development for Teachers on Effective Resource Use**

*We don't get enough training on how to use the play materials effectively, so sometimes we just figure things out on our own. T4*

*The workshops are not frequent, and when they happen, they focus more on theory than on practical ways to use resources in class. T12*

These quotes imply that financial constraints, limited institutional support, and insufficient training undermine teachers' ability to utilise resources effectively, weakening the overall implementation of play-based pedagogy and reducing learning opportunities for children.

***What are early-childhood teachers' experiences regarding their training and preparedness for play-based pedagogical practices in early childhood centres within Yilo-Krobo Municipality?***

### **Theme 1: Level of Teacher Training and Qualifications**

This theme explores the teachers' formal education, specialised preparation in play-based pedagogy, and adherence to national ECE standards. The findings suggest that gaps in qualifications and targeted training influence teachers' confidence and preparedness to deliver effective play-based learning experiences.

#### **Subtheme 1.1: Formal Qualifications in Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

Some teachers hold diplomas or degrees in Early Childhood Education, while others lack formal ECE backgrounds. One participant noted,

*"I completed a diploma in Early Childhood Education, but many of my colleagues come from different backgrounds without any ECE specialization. T3*

Another added,

*Some of us have the required qualifications, but others are teaching at the kindergarten level with no formal ECE training. T8*

#### **Subtheme 1.2: Specialized Training in Play-Based Pedagogical Approaches**

Participants reported that pre-service training tended to focus on theory rather than practical application:

*We were taught the theory of play in school, but we were not trained deeply on how to apply play-based methods in real classrooms. T4*

*Most of my training didn't focus specifically on play-based learning, so I sometimes struggle to design activities that match the approach. T6*

### **Subtheme 1.3: Certification and Compliance with National Standards**

Teachers also highlighted inconsistencies in certification and the application of national standards:

*I have my teaching license, which is now a national requirement for ECE teachers. T11*

*The curriculum expects teachers to be trained and certified, but in practice, many classrooms are handled by unqualified personnel. That is, some teachers in early childhood classrooms hold basic education qualifications rather than early childhood. T2*

These quotes imply that gaps in formal qualifications, limited practical training in play-based pedagogy, and inconsistent certification undermine teachers' preparedness and confidence, restricting their ability to deliver developmentally appropriate, engaging, and curriculum-aligned learning experiences.

## **Theme 2: Professional Development and Continuous Learning**

This theme focuses on teachers' opportunities for professional growth, the level of institutional support they receive, and their attitudes toward continuous learning. The data suggest that professional development is limited, inconsistently supported, and sometimes undervalued.

### **Subtheme 2.1: Access to Workshops, Seminars, and Refresher Courses**

*We only attend workshops once in a long while, and sometimes the information does not cover practical classroom needs. T7*

*I wish we had more refresher courses because the last one I attended was almost two years ago. T5*

### **Subtheme 2.2: Institutional Support for Ongoing Training**

*Our school doesn't always sponsor us for training, so many teachers skip workshops because they have to pay out of their own pockets. T1*

*The district office encourages training, but the support is inconsistent, and not everyone gets the chance to attend. T9*

### **Subtheme 2.3: varied Teacher Behaviour Toward Continuous Professional Development**

*"I am always eager to learn new strategies, but the opportunities are limited, which makes improvement difficult. T10*

*"Some teachers don't really show interest in training because they feel it won't change much in their classroom situation. T4*

These quotes imply that limited access to workshops, inconsistent institutional support, and mixed teacher behaviour hinder continuous professional growth, reducing teachers' capacity to update skills and effectively implement play-based pedagogy in their classrooms.

## **Theme 3: Pedagogical Competence and Classroom Practice**

This theme examines teachers' understanding of play-based learning principles, their ability to design and implement activities, and the challenges they face in translating training into practice.

### **Subtheme 3.1: Teachers' Understanding of Play-Based Learning Principles**

*I know play helps children learn, but sometimes I am not sure how to connect the play activities directly to the learning outcomes. T5*

*We understand the importance of play, but we need more guidance on how to structure it effectively. T8*

### **Subtheme 3.2: Ability to Design and Implement Play-Based Activities**

*I try to design activities based on the curriculum, but without enough materials, it becomes difficult to implement them well. T4*

*I enjoy planning play lessons, but managing the activities with large class sizes is a big challenge. T5*

### **Subtheme 3.3: Challenges in Applying Training to Real Classroom Contexts**

*What we learn from workshops doesn't always fit the realities here because our classes are overcrowded and under-resourced. T3*

*Even when we understand the methods, applying them becomes hard due to the lack of space, materials, and time. T7*

These quotes suggest that gaps in teacher training, limited access to professional development, and challenging classroom conditions undermine teachers' confidence and competence, restricting their ability to implement play-based pedagogy effectively and limiting children's opportunities for meaningful, engaging learning experiences.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Material resources available to teachers for play-based pedagogical practices at early childhood centers in Yilo-Krobo Municipality***

The findings from this study reaffirm the central role of material resources in enabling meaningful play-based pedagogical practices, consistent with established literature. Play-based learning, as emphasised by Piaget's constructivist view and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, requires access to varied, high-quality materials through which children engage, explore, and construct knowledge (Parker & Thomsen, 2019; Main, 2021). However, teachers in Yilo-Krobo reported persistent shortages, limited variety, and deteriorating materials, which impeded their ability to provide developmentally appropriate and diverse play experiences. This aligns with studies showing that inadequate resources restrict active, child-centred learning and often force teachers to rely on repetitive or teacher-directed activities (Jay & Knaus, 2018). The uneven distribution of materials across rural and urban schools in the municipality also reflects broader regional disparities documented across Sub-Saharan Africa, where resource scarcity disproportionately affects rural centres (Adamu, 2024; Quaynor & Osei, 2021). Although teachers demonstrated creativity by improvising with bottle tops, stones, and recycled objects mirroring Trina's (2022) assertion that local materials can enrich play these efforts were insufficient to compensate for the lack of durable, curriculum-aligned resources, particularly for supporting fine motor development, pretend play, and outdoor exploration. Furthermore, challenges such as limited funding, delayed institutional support, and infrequent practical training further undermined teachers' ability to maximise the use of available materials, echoing global findings that systemic support structures significantly influence the implementation of play-based pedagogy (Marks, 2020). The inconsistencies between the curriculum's expectations and the realities of resource provision in Yilo-Krobo reflect ongoing concerns identified by NaCCA (2019) and Ghanaian empirical studies, which note that despite the curriculum's emphasis on play, most schools still struggle to access the necessary materials (Shah, 2018; Song, 2023). Overall, the study's findings contribute to the growing evidence that material resource availability is foundational to effective play-based pedagogy, and that without sufficient, high-quality, and equitably distributed resources, teachers' ability to actualise the curriculum's play-based vision remains significantly constrained.

### ***Teachers' Experiences Regarding Their Training and Preparedness for Play-based Pedagogical Practices***

The findings reveal that early-childhood teachers in Yilo-Krobo experience significant gaps in their training and preparedness for implementing play-based pedagogy, reflecting challenges widely discussed in the literature. Although Ghana's Kindergarten curriculum emphasises play as the primary medium for learning (NaCCA, 2019; James, 2020), many teachers lack specialised Early Childhood Education qualifications, while others have received largely theoretical pre-service preparation. This mirrors national studies showing inconsistent teacher competence and limited practical exposure to play-based instructional methods (Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020). Teachers' accounts of struggling to link play activities to learning outcomes and uncertainty about structuring meaningful play reflect the broader issue of insufficient hands-on training.

Furthermore, the data show that professional development opportunities are infrequent, inconsistently supported, and often disconnected from classroom realities. This aligns with research indicating that PD in many Ghanaian districts, especially rural ones, is irregular, theory-heavy, and lacking follow-up coaching or modelling, which limits its impact on classroom practice (Eshun, 2022; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Teachers' complaints

about paying for workshops, limited district sponsorship, and the absence of practical guidance reinforce literature highlighting uneven PD reach across districts, despite national initiatives such as those championed by Right To Play and the Ghana Education Service (Onyango et al., 2023; Laney, 2025).

Teachers also described practical constraints large class sizes, inadequate materials, and overcrowding, that hinder the application of training. Similarly, PD becomes effective only when it incorporates contextually relevant strategies and models the use of low-cost, local materials (Wolf, 2018; Tatsi et al., 2025; Sakyi, 2022). Overall, the findings demonstrate that insufficient qualifications, limited PD, and contextual barriers collectively weaken teachers' preparedness to implement play-based pedagogy effectively.

### **Conclusions**

The study found that early childhood centres in Yilo-Krobo Municipality are constrained by limited, unevenly distributed, and often deteriorated play materials, which restrict teachers' ability to facilitate diverse, engaging, and developmentally appropriate play-based activities. The findings highlight the critical role of adequate, high-quality, and well-maintained resources in supporting teachers to deliver meaningful learning experiences.

In addition, teachers reported experiencing inconsistent and fragmented training in play-based pedagogy, with minimal follow-up, practical demonstrations, or ongoing coaching. These gaps in professional development weaken teachers' confidence and pedagogical competence, limiting their ability to translate curriculum intentions into classroom practice and increasing dependence on informal peer support.

### **Recommendations**

The Yilo-Krobo Municipal Education Directorate should ensure that all early childhood centres receive adequate, diverse, and safe play materials within the next 12 months. Centres should conduct quarterly inventories and maintenance checks to guarantee materials are functional, equitable, and sufficient to support play-based learning for all children.

The Municipal Education Directorate, in partnership with NGOs such as Right To Play, should implement at least two practical, context-specific workshops per year, coupled with monthly in-class coaching and mentoring. Teacher progress in designing and implementing play-based activities should be monitored through termly classroom observations and self-assessment checklists to measure improvement in pedagogical competence.

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